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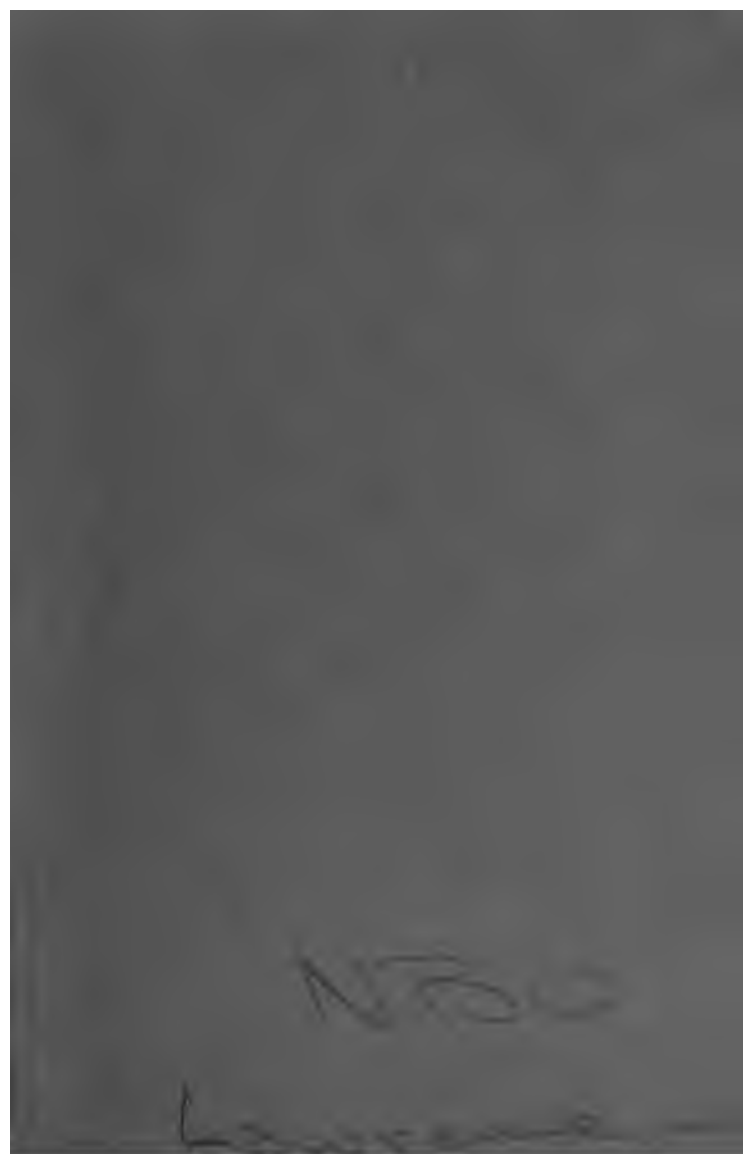
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**THE CONFESSIONS  
OF AN OLD MAID**



# THE CONFESSIONS OF AN OLD MAID

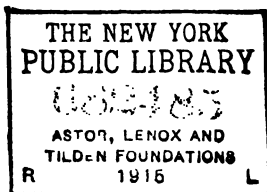
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LOU LAWRENCE

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WOMEN  
ALSO  
VOTED

## INTRODUCTORY.

Confessions are fashionable. We have the "Confessions of a Kid," "Confessions of a Society Belle," and "Confessions of a Grandmother." We have also the "Confessions of a Thief" and the "Confessions of a Murderer." Now why not have the "Confessions of an Old Maid?" A woman does not need to be or to do anything unusual before she feels it incumbent upon her to make a confession. With men it is different. They must do something out of the ordinary before they have the nerve to go into the confessing business. I might add that the last two books cited were written by men.

Women are born pioneers. It was a woman who ate the apple and brought knowledge into the world. That was a notable event. Eve ought to have been pensioned. I move that this matter be taken up at the next session of Congress. Although it may be a little difficult to determine the whereabouts of the old lady, herself, there are to be found a goodly number of her daughters who would be quite willing to help manage the back pay.

It would be difficult to over-estimate the services of this pioneer of pioneers. What would the world be without knowledge? Just a sort of wholesale menagerie in which man would be fighting it out with the other animals. If there were no knowledge



in the world, there could be no art of printing; and, if there were no art of printing, there could be no confessions; and a considerable number of us would be thrown out of employment.

With regard to this confession that I, an Old Maid, am going to make, I desire to have a fair understanding at the outset. I want to assure all those people who shall be so fortunate as to have an opportunity of perusing the finished work, that it will be quite true as far as the truth will go; but, as my experience never went very far, I shall, undoubtedly, be forced to resort to imagination to help fill up. It will not be difficult, however, for the intelligent reader to pick out the facts of my life. He will need to remember only that "truth is stranger than fiction," and he will have the infallible key.

I am acting thus frankly, not because I consider it my duty to do so, but because it is my nature to be frank under all circumstances. If it were nothing more than a duty, I presume that I should not have made this explanation; for I have an idea that it will not conduce to the profit of this venture. Notwithstanding there be these three: Duty, Profit, and Nature; the greatest of all is Nature.

I know that this frankness of mine is not a desirable quality; but then—this is a Confession. I have frequently found that this peculiarity of my mental constitution could prove itself very annoy-

ing; for instance, when a literary friend wanted my opinion of his latest historical novel.

I have been urged to the writing of this book by various circumstances, a few of which I will proceed to enumerate. The first of these is the manifest lack of a literature dealing with the characteristics, devoted to the interests, and adapted to the needs of the numerous class to which I belong. There has been a long-felt want for something along this line; and I flatter myself that my labors will receive a just appreciation in this field, something which might be a little uncertain in the more frequented paths of literature. "Truth, ground to earth, will rise again." So will genius; but, occasionally, the resurrected is not altogether presentable. Especially is this the case if there is a small matter of fifty thousand other geniuses engaged in a like struggle. Hence, the crowning feat of genius is specialization.

Another source of inspiration for this task is a knowledge, gained from various sources, of the wonderful fortunes that have been amassed by the sale of some recent books. I do not wish to give the impression that I am unusually mercenary. Such is really not the case. In fact, if I have any leaning in this particular, it is in the opposite direction. But, as I like an occasional bird-on-toast with a cup of chocolate, and have great need of an assortment of silks, sables, pearls, and other like trifles of dress,

I must confess to being slightly swayed by the pecuniary possibilities connected with such an undertaking. Moreover, there is a certain cozy residence in our village, on which I have long had a covetous eye. I do not use the term, "covetous," in any mean sense. My desire is simply to better the condition of mankind by adding to the happiness of one of its units. Besides, I fancy that I might be conferring a benefit upon the present owner, who built it some time ago at a cost of twenty-five thousand dollars. At that time he had a very large family; but most of his children are now grown, and are beginning to marry and leave him. Hence, I conclude that he, not having any literary ability, and being in the mercantile line, might prefer to live in a less commodious house and make an addition to his business capital.

There being no doubt in my mind as to the benefit which the world must derive from this particular confession, my most potent reason for taking up my pen is my desire to place it before the public. Being integral units of the sum total of humanity, the members of Our Sisterhood are under obligations to use their talents for the general welfare. This proposition carries with it the corresponding one that the greater the talents, the greater is the obligation. Thus it will be seen that my obligation in the matter is very great; and I am most happy to

realize that circumstances bid fair to render the duty rather profitable.

Again, the completion of this work will, no doubt, place me before the people of the country in a very distinct and enviable light; and, it being my nature to desire a large share of public attention, it will be seen at a glance that the three great forces, Duty, Profit, and Nature, have conspired to produce this book.



## I.

### 'A' FIRST APPEARANCE.

To begin at the beginning and to be perfectly accurate, I will say that I was born in the nineteenth century. I admire accuracy. You admire accuracy. Everybody admires accuracy. Hence, I am determined to be accurate; and I defy any critic to gainsay the exact truth of the foregoing statement. There may be some people who will be so ill-mannered as to point to the few white threads above my temples, and hint that they tend to throw doubt upon the truth of my statement about this matter; but I want to assure these cavilers that I come of a family whose hair has a peculiar tendency to turn gray at an early age. Moreover, I want them to notice that I am not the only gray-haired child of the nineteenth century, although the twentieth is still in its swaddling clothes. A century is not such a very large affair; and yet, if one lives fast enough, he can get gray hairs inside a century.

I freely admit that I have lived fast. Everybody lives as fast as possible in these days. They are not, all of them, making time over the same track; but they get there all the same. That the course over which it has been my lot to try my speed is located in a small mining village, is the main reason why

I am living and able to write this confession in the twentieth century. Many women who were born in the nineteenth century are dead long ago.

I wish the reader to understand that I do not use slang. Such expressions as "get there" and "all the same," used in the previous paragraph, are not slang by any means. They have become a part of the ever-flexible English language. "Get there" simply means to reach the goal, and will soon come to be written "getthere," after the style of other compound words. I am a purist, and pride myself on the perfection of my English.

But this has been rather a digression (not altogether unwarranted, however), and I will go back to the time when I got here. I made my arrival on Sunday, and it is a curious coincidence that I have enjoyed Sunday visiting ever since.

I have no very distinct recollections of my experiences during the first few days of my stay upon this whirling atom in the infinitude of Space; but I was not very old when I began to see that I was a person of no small consequence. Everybody's happiness appeared to depend upon my actions. My mother seemed to think that I had been born for the express purpose of showing off a variety of pretty clothes which she happened to have stored away in a small hair trunk. Every day I was forced to

exhibit a different suit. Sometimes, when I suffered unduly from an indigestion that was early brought upon me by my being forced to take nourishment whether I wanted it or not, I managed to dislodge a part of the contents of my delicate stomach upon the front of some lace-trimmed creation, and paid the penalty by having a freshly-starched garment fastened about my tender neck.

After contributing sufficiently to my mother's happiness, I was carefully handed over to my father, who proceeded to prepare my face for the coming battle with the sun and winds of earth. Naturally, the thin red skin was far too tender; and he began a hardening process by giving it a thorough rubbing with a beard of twenty-four hours' growth. The endearing terms with which he accompanied the performance were very gratifying; but he sometimes carried the treatment to such an extent that it dawned upon my infantile faculties that his main purpose was to enjoy a play with the baby. It was during one of these procedures, that I made my first voluntary protest against having been brought into the world for the pleasure of other people, and I have been making these protests ever since. I must admit that my kicking never rendered it possible for me to conduct myself as I thought would be most conducive to my own happiness; but I have



had the satisfaction of knowing that I have given the least possible pleasure to other people.

While making these preliminary protests, I drew my face into all manner of contortions, and screamed as loudly as my lungs would permit; whereupon it would become evident to my father that I was not disposed to fulfil my mission in his behalf. Then he would hand me back to mother, who immediately filled my stomach so full of milk that there was little room left for the expansion of my lungs. This process necessarily diminished my cries; and, as the smarting subsided, I thought it prudent to restrain them altogether in the hope of being put to bed, where I would have to accommodate my small anatomy to nothing more uncomfortable than a pillow.

This book would scarcely have fulfilled its promise if I failed to mention the fact that I sometimes managed to wriggle off that pillow. Those were moments of short-lived bliss. Mother usually found me inside of five minutes, and my return to the pillow was inevitable. As a matter of course, a baby didn't know what was good for it; and "the pillow was such a soft, dainty, pretty thing."

Then there were a few visitors for whose amusement I appeared to have been especially designed. There were the children of the neighborhood, whose mothers, wanting them out of the way, would frequently send them to see, or to nurse Mrs. ——'s

baby. If anyone is curious to understand how much I enjoyed these visits, he has but to imagine how agreeable it would be to be tied up in a number of loose sheets, and nursed, carried about, and kissed by some being no more than two sizes larger than himself. Occasionally, these little mothers would carry me with my head toward the floor, or prevent my falling while they were in the act of changing positions, by squeezing me hard around the stomach with one small arm. I'm sure that I kicked hard with both feet, and struck out wildly with both arms, and beat my head against their faces; but the well-meaning dears did not mind it a bit. Sometimes I resorted to the use of my lungs, which brought mother to my rescue and gave the young nurses a much needed rest.

Following the little girls, came the adult females. The men, fortunately, left me to rest in peace. Some people hint that they have never ceased to pay me this deference. Be that as it may, I am certain that I was very grateful to them for their consideration during that first period of long dresses.

These lady visitors had various peculiarities. Some of them had bad colds, nearly all of them had bad breaths, a few used snuff, and all of them had cold hands. But there was no variety in their methods of showing their love. They, one and all, snuggled my small face up against their bosoms,

kissed me an extravagant number of times, and never failed to blow their breath in my face. No small number of them indulged in this last performance for the mere fun of seeing me bat my eyes. It is quite likely that each and all of them meant very kindly toward me; and I suppose that it was merely the perversity of my depraved human nature which caused me to feel any objections. But I did feel the objections. There can be no doubt about that.

There may be people who will consider it very absurd for an Old Maid to write about having been a baby. It really was absurd to be a baby; but here is another point in which Nature got the better of Duty and Profit. It would have been better just to have been born an Old Maid. No doubt there are some members of the Sisterhood who were born that way. At least, I have seen some of whom I could not conceive the possibility of their ever having been anything different from what they are at present.

But, it being my nature to be a baby once in my life, and this being a confession, I am forced to admit the very inconvenient fact that I was once no more than a regulation infant. I sincerely hope, however, that I shall never have to re-enter that state of existence. It is so very uncomfortable, especially the sitting on the floor in winter time.

That was one of my great trials. I was always disposed to be a little chilly, and the air at the bottom of the room was not half so much to my taste as that of a greater altitude. But keeping me on the floor was much better for the peace of those who had charge of me, and on the floor I stayed. The trouble arose from my unnatural desire to investigate my surroundings. For this purpose, I began crawling when rather young; and, as a natural consequence, was liable to crawl off the bed or fall out of a chair; but there was no immediate danger of my falling off the floor. I made as much fuss as I possibly could about the arrangement, but it was all of no avail.

That a girl was ever inclined to use profanity will probably be doubted by those who have never been girls themselves; and I blush when I state that I sometimes thought baby "swear-words" when one of the other children opened an outside door and let in a gust of wind that almost swept my little body up the chimney. If I could have had my wish and occupied a higher position, there would probably have been a danger of my being swept out of doors; but there would also have been the comfort of making the trip in a warmer atmosphere.

If any of the Sisterhood professes to be shocked at this admission of mine, I will wager a copy of this book against one thousand dollars that, if we

had access to the books of the "recording angel,"  
I could prove that they had felt just the same way;  
and that, too, under less provocation. But then!  
they don't have to make a confession.

## II.

### GROWTH AND LOVE-LETTERS.

Despite the trials of babyhood, I managed to live and add to my stature pretty rapidly; and circumstances behoove me to admit that I added to my temper in like degree. When I reached my sixth year, I was a large child with a large temper and large hands and feet. Mother was a great deal ashamed of me with my many imperfections. Poor mother! I fear she failed to remember that I had not had the fashioning of myself, physically or mentally. Still, I pity her now. It must be very humiliating to have an unattractive child, one who, like myself, is not only ungainly in person but certain to say and do the wrong thing at the wrong time.

It is all right for adults to be erratic, bluff, dogmatic and self-assertive; but it is absolutely unpardonable in children. Every child should be consistent, bland, and self-repressed. At least that is what the world appeared to expect of me, and what I very early determined not to be if I could avoid it. Although society, as far as I knew it, never wavered in its conviction that its pleasure should be my sole consideration, I lost no time in beginning life for myself. It was a battle. It had to be a battle,

for I was as fully determined to bend the world to my will as it was to bend me to its own. I did not know but that the world might be in the right, but I didn't care if it was. I did not say to myself that I was in the world with the rest of them, and there, too, through no fault of my own, and that I intended to follow their example and occupy as much space as I could; I did not say that, as far as my ability went, I had a perfect right to make as much noise as older people; but I just went ahead and did both, except when I was beaten out in the struggle.

I did sometimes get beaten off my ground, but I simply staked off another camp and proceeded to bid defiance. I was never conquered in those old days. I never gave up the struggle against the world, which seemed so closely linked against me. This was my trouble, this feeling that it was my one puny little self against the great combination of others; and it is the cross that falls to the lot of most children. If I could have known that every individual unit which composed this great Others was as much divided against every other unit as it was against me, the battle would have been very insignificant. I should have known then that I stood an equal chance with the rest, and should have been able to appreciate the good in my surroundings. But I felt the evil so much more keenly than I did the good. Everybody does this. Everybody forgets

the little pleasures and remembers the little pains. From choice, many appear to forget the pains; but they don't forget them any more than they shed the scars left by fire or edged tools. Pleasures don't leave scars. I don't say that I have not learned at the present time to seem to forget the pains, but I had not done so when I was six years old. Just as I would know now to wear a high collar if I had a scar on my neck, although I should never have thought of it then.

Please don't think that I didn't have any friends. I had many of them. I was an affectionate child with tender hazel eyes and a Madonna-like face, and was not altogether uninteresting, even with my big hands and feet. Many people liked me very well so long as we did not have any serious disagreement; but if we ever disagreed hopelessly, the sugar was all out in the rain. For the very reason that I would not say insulting things about their opinions, I could not forget the unkind things they said about mine. I was never disposed to get mad, pull hair, and then kiss and make up. I could refrain from hair-pulling if others would do the same; but after the hair was gone, I didn't do any kissing. I would willingly wear a bonnet while the hair was renewing itself if my antagonist would follow my lead; but I would never put up my lips to ~~be~~ kissed, because kisses will never grow hair.



If they would do this, people with kisses to spare might make fortunes out of these bald-headed men.

It may be difficult for the reader to understand how very much I did enjoy those childhood days in spite of the "warfare of life" which made such a deep impression upon my mind. I am a born optimist. I wouldn't kiss the hair-puller, but I always thought that he would never do it again. No difference how many times the performance was repeated, I always believed that each time would be the last. I was sure that the great world and myself were pitted against each other, but I thought that the world was going to be better. I am not sure but I had an idea that I was going to reform it. I think I must have believed that one day the world would be on its knees suing for my favor instead of trying to force me into the small groove that it had prepared for me. Certain it is that I was always building castles of bright and varied hues, which were to materialize some time in the distant future.

I clearly recollect one such structure which came from my brain at the close of my first school term. We had "an exhibition" at night, and I gave a recitation. It is strange that I cannot recall the text of that poem; but the people seemed to like it, whatever it may have been, and applauded liberally when it was finished. Then the teacher came and took me

in her lap and told me how well I had done and how proud she was of my success. I cuddled up against her shoulder and thought about the time when there would be an immense audience in a large room—almost as big as the whole town was then—and I should stand up before it and “say speeches” all day long.

I did not know that it was my own vanity which prompted this idea. I thought I was to do it all for the good of the people. Hadn't they laughed and clapped their hands then? and wouldn't they like to laugh and clap their hands for a whole day? I never thought of failure then; and I verily believe that, if the world hadn't put it into my head, I shouldn't have thought of it until this day. That is one grudge I shall always have against the world. If it had continued to applaud my performances, I should have supposed my efforts to be invariably successful.

The fear of failure is such a disagreeable thing. If it had been fashionable for Old Maids to have children, I am sure that I should have had a large family; and I am equally certain that I should never have allowed this haunting fear to be instilled unnecessarily into any of its members. There are more lives blighted by a lack of self-confidence than by any other one mental quality. Failure is like a ghost. When one is thinking about it, he is almost certain to see it. Still the comparison is not per-

fect. I have sometimes met with failure when I was not meditating upon its appearance, which has never happened to me in the case of ghosts.

I am inclined to believe that it was during that first year at school that I received my earliest love-letter; and it could not have been later than the second. My mother had been a little dilatory in her training on this point, and I was not quite prepared for the emergency. A class had been dismissed; and as I sat staring at the passing pupils, one of the boys reached out his hand and laid a folded paper upon my desk. I gazed after him in blank astonishment for a full minute, and then swept the paper from the desk to the floor. It settled down under the stove; and as soon as the teacher's back was turned, a boy from the opposite side of the room crept from his seat and picked it up. How those boys did double themselves up and hold their noses to keep from laughing when they read poor Joe's letter! And how intensely I did wish the teacher would see and whip every one of them! Joe had witnessed the entire performance, and soon the little imps began making signs to him. Oh, how red his face did get! and how reproachfully he looked across the room to where I sat. I began to comprehend, and it occurred to me that I ought to have put the paper inside the neck of my dress as I had seen the larger girls do with papers of similar appearance.

But how was I to have known it? The great hulking things would never condescend to tell us little ones where those papers which they laughed over so much had come from. At last, school was dismissed; and as soon as we were out in the yard, the boys gathered round me and began to sing a lot of rhymes; and Joe wouldn't speak to me. Then the boys told the large girls; and Joe ran off down the hill one way, and I ran down another, and left those horrid children executing a perfect war-dance on the playground.

No doubt my conduct was very silly for a seven-year-old girl. I certainly should have read that letter and smiled on Joe. I tried to smile on him, later on, but he would not accept the atonement.

I am perfectly sure that it never occurred to me to read the contents of that paper, because I didn't do that when I received a second letter sometime later. George wrote the second one; and, profiting by Joe's experience, he made me hold out my hand while he placed the letter in it. Well! I held onto that precious epistle like grim death. I don't think that I even went so far as to take the risk of changing it from one hand to the other until I had reached home; although I had to recite my spelling lesson before the dismissal.

When I arrived at my home I threw down my books and ran down to the foot of the garden where

a place had been fixed to get over the fence on the way to the creek which ran below the house. In summer, mother was in the habit of doing her washing at this stream; but I am not certain whether, or not, it was my purpose to wash the letter; for before I could get over the fence, I was confronted by an obstacle to further progress, in the shape of father with a small load of fresh clover. The sight of the hay directed my attention to the stable, which stood beside the path, and where a load of hay had already been deposited. Like a flash I ran into the stable and put the letter down into the soft hay as far as my arm would reach. Then I scuttled off to the house, leaving dear old George's tender lines in the haymow. What became of them I never knew. I made frequent searches, but was never able to find the letter, and at last I decided that father must have fed them to old Brindle. I can't say what effect it had upon her health; though I do remember that she once had an attack of "hollow horn." Whether it was caused by the indigestibility of that letter, or not, I am not able to say.

### III.

#### "PICK UP THAT HAT."

I think that I certainly must have been what is called "a little soft;" and I may be a little that way yet. Though always ready to make battle if one encroached openly or roughly upon my rights, I was very susceptible to smooth phrases and loud professions. I believed that everybody meant just what they said, but I have gotten partially over that weakness. I'm sure that I believe Mary Russell to have had the best of intentions when she suggested that it would be a good plan for us to take turns in hunting for soap-stone pencils, and that, if I would carry her books to school one morning and let her do the hunting, she would carry mine on the following day while I made my search.

The schoolhouse stood on a steep hill that overlooked the little village, and a wagon track, cut around the side of the hill, formed one of the paths by which we reached the place. On the upper side of this road, the pencils, or rather the rock from which they were made, was to be found. I dutifully carried Mary's books up the hill on the morning after the bargain was made, and she managed to gather a great handful of the thin gray strips. I may have felt a somewhat covetous sensation at the

sight of them. Indeed, I think I did, but I comforted myself with the thought that to-morrow would be my turn.

On the succeeding day I was ready for school and waiting at our door long before the usual time for Mary's arrival; but no Mary came, and finally, mother started me off to school with an injunction to "hurry, or I would be tardy." I reached the schoolhouse in time to go in when the bell rang, and was surprised to find Mary already in her place. At recess she assured me that "her mother made her come to school by the footpath," and I believed her; but I put a black mark down in my memory beside the name of Mrs. Russell.

Since that summer morning in Hammondsville, I have found a very considerable number of Mary Russells in the world; but I have quit blaming their mothers beyond the extent to which all mothers are responsible for their children. I have, occasionally, wondered at the success which so generally attends the movements of these ladies; but I suppose there must be a great many ignorant little Ouses in the world, too.

My sister Nancy served me many tricks quite as mean as that of Mary Russell. I have no hesitation now in calling their conduct mean. I should have termed it so at the time if I had understood its full

significance, and there would have been war on the spot. It was only my ignorance that preserved the peace. Nancy was one of the goody-good girls. She always did just what she was told and some things that she had not been commanded. I never made any pretense of executing a task because someone had ordered me to do it. If it suited my inclination to do so, I obeyed orders with alacrity; but if I felt any serious objection to the work, I never undertook it unless the commander had more muscle than I had, and sometimes not even then. Not that I was especially unruly. Far from it. But when I was inclined to be disobedient I was a terror. I may add, by way of extenuation, that I always thought I was in the right when I refused to obey my elders, or my equals either; and I think so still. Yet, if I had known it, it would have been so much easier to have yielded to superior force, than to begin the battle and suffer ultimate defeat.

But I was not always defeated. I distinctly remember the circumstance about father's hat. One of us had brushed it from the table to the floor, and he commanded a younger child to pick it up and hand it to him. The little one ran on past without paying the least attention; and I, who was behind her, received the same order. I followed her exam-



ple, and was called back. Straightening my tall, lank body, I said:

"You told Dodie first, make her do it."

Now, my father was not a man to be trifled with. More than ordinarily kind to his children, he usually received implicit obedience; and this conduct of mine was a little too much for his self-respect. With a face and voice which hinted a distant thunderstorm, he told me to "stop talking and hand him his hat." With set teeth and flashing eyes, I shook my head.

How many times he told me to pick up the hat, and what means he resorted to, in the hope of winning my obedience, I cannot now state quite accurately, therefore I will not attempt to describe that part of the battle; but when he took me by the arm, led me to the back door, put me out on the porch in the dark, and told me that "I could stay there until I was willing to obey him," I had a sensation that impressed itself upon my memory.

A number of times I was asked through the door if I would pick up the hat; and as often I answered: "No."

At last, bedtime arrived, and mother took me into the house and sent me to bed. I haven't picked up the hat yet; and, what is more, I feel obliged to add that I'm glad I didn't. My dearly loved father! He had no idea that his course was just. But he had

heard the command, "Children, obey your parents," and he meant to do his part toward having it carried out.

It will be noticed that I behaved on the principle of a young man of my acquaintance, who said that "he believed we should always obey our parents when we thought they were right." That was exactly the tenet to which I pinned my faith, and to which I am clinging now when I have a generous sprinkling of gray hairs on my head. But there is another article in my confession of faith, and it is this: Parents should always be right.

I began to tell how Nancy served me about the berries; but was led into this digression by a desire to confess this unconventionality in my make-up, and a wish to show how Nancy came to have the best of me. She would have picked up that miserable hat; and as soon as father and mother were out of the room, she would have thrown it on the floor again. Nancy always had her way in the end. She had her way about the berries, as I might have known she would, if I had been as well acquainted with her as I am now.

We, sisters, were sent in company with Anna Nelson to gather wild raspberries. When mother gave me my bucket, she said:


"Now, Ouisse, see if you can't get as many berries

in your bucket as Nancy gets in hers." Frankly speaking, I was never considered an industrious child; but mother knew that I could work to an advantage if I would.

For that one afternoon I labored as diligently as mother could wish, fully as hard as any eight-year-old girl should be expected to do, and had as many berries as the other girls when we stopped to rest as the two o'clock train went up the creek. Nancy and Anna were racing for the first bucketful. They were not paying much attention to me as I was too little to be considered in the race. When we went back to our task after resting, Nancy motioned me off to one side and told me that "she was afraid Anna would beat her."

"You see, Ouise," she continued, "my bucket is a little bigger than hers, and if you'll give me a part of your berries to make up for that, I'll help you get your bucket clear full after mine is done."

I demurred a little at first but being in the habit of yielding to her in the main, I allowed her to take about half my berries. This helped her somewhat, but she had wasted so much time in convincing me of the propriety of our course that our companion had made a great gain. In a short time, Nancy slipped back to where I was at work; and, without even saying "If you please," poured another half of my berries into her bucket. This performance filled



it nearly full, and it was only a short time before I heard her softly saying:

"Anna, my bucket won't hold any more. How's yours?"

Nancy wouldn't gloat openly. Not she! She was "almost sorry she had beaten;" and, "if she didn't have to help Ouise to fill her bucket, she would surely help Anna to finish hers."

After grumbling about "having been ahead awhile ago," Anna declared that "there were no more berries there worth picking, and she was going home." Nancy wanted to go, too, but I hung back, and at last, called her to come back to me because "I wanted to tell her something."

She very discreetly did as I requested. Nancy was always discreet. What I had to tell her was that "if she didn't stay and help me to fill my bucket as she had promised, I would tell Anna how she had managed to beat her in the race."

Again she showed her discretion, and assured Anna that "she would have to stay and help this baby awhile." Our little friend went home, and we went back to work; but I was hot, tired, and discouraged, and suffered Nancy to persuade me that, as it was very little over half full, there really were not enough berries to fill the pail.

Mother gave me the usual reprimand for "my

carelessness." I was ready with my excuse, but Nancy, seeing me bridling up for defense, said:

"Ouisse put a few in my bucket, mother, but not very many."

She had ruined my plea by her readiness to admit a part of it, though not enough to eclipse her own glory.

That night I wondered what God had made Nancy and me for. There wasn't any use for both of us. I always worked better if she were out of the way, and she never did anything for me except to tell mother of my misdemeanors. But then I remembered how I had helped her to defeat Anna in their race, and that I sometimes assisted her to prepare her lessons, and that mother always kept me from school when she needed help, "because Nancy was older and wouldn't have so long to go;" and I decided that "God had made me for Nancy's benefit." Poor God! in my childish innocence, I did him the great wrong of supposing he could be so unjust as to make one sentient being for the benefit of another.

#### IV.

#### "I WISH SHE WOULD DIE."

In her self-imposed rôle of informant, Nancy frequently found plenty to occupy her time. I have no idea that my sister had any thought of doing wrong when she made it her business to report all my sins of omission and commission. She was by nature one of those individuals who feel that the morals of others are given into their keeping. I don't think she was ever sorry when she caught me in any iniquity, either small or great. It made business for her, and Nancy liked business. Besides, the more glaring the evil in which she was able to detect me, the brighter, by contrast, it made her own goodness appear. Like all such people, she gloried in her own superiority. Nancy knew that she was born to be an angel, and would have felt no concern about it had the rest of us turned out to be devils, if it had not been for the fact that she wanted us punished. She never strayed very far from the truth. In fact, she kept so very near it in appearances, that I supposed it would be safe to stake my life upon her veracity. But, somehow, she had a way of stating facts which made them look so very different from the manner in which they presented themselves to

me. Now, let the reader fancy, if he can, the effect of Nancy's rendition of the following story:

A number of us small girls were at play along the bank of Yellow Creek, which skirted the village in which we lived. We were divided up into couples, and engaged in building houses from the flat creek stones. I was wearing a quaint red ring that was my especial pride. I recollect that it was said to have been made from red coral. For the truth of this statement I cannot vouch, but I am sure that it was pretty, and one of my most valued possessions.

While we were engaged in putting the roof on our house, Maggie, my companion builder, was so unfortunate as to drop a rock on my hand and crush this beloved ring. I shouldn't have minded the injury to my hand, which showed the blood in spots, but the loss of the ring made me nearly frantic, and I gave Maggie a slap with the full weight of that "big hand" for which I was somewhat celebrated. Then we both began to cry, and the other girls gathered around us to learn the cause of the house being divided against itself.

"She slapped me," sobbed Maggie.

"She broke my ring first, and it's none of your business if I did slap her," I cried angrily. I presume that I expected all of them to take Maggie's part in the quarrel; and, unwittingly, took measures to make them do so. Anyway, who would ever have

thought of taking my side of any dispute? I was "such a great overgrown thing," and fully able to look out for myself. Sympathy on my behalf would surely have been wasted, so folks seemed to think.

"Well, I didn't mean to break your old ring, and you hadn't any business to slap me," declared Maggie, drying her tears.

"That she didn't, and I'll tell mother on her," asserted Nancy.

I saw that if I were ever to get any satisfaction for the loss of my treasure, I must do it then. The girls were already making light remarks about the value of "the footy little red thing," so I transferred my remarks to Maggie's general character.

"It isn't fair that I should have to build with Mag," I objected. "She's a slow, poky thing, and good for nothing but to break things."

"I'm older than you are," affirmed my enemy, "and I'm just as good as you are, too; and I'm going to play with you every time."

The bystanders all decided that this would be but a just punishment for my crime. They failed to consider Maggie's comfort and happiness. I didn't think of that, either; and, knowing that so large a majority would have to rule, I fairly shrieked:

"I hope she'll die this very night."

"Oh, Ouise, don't say that!" implored Maggie's



sister. "It's an awful sin to wish folks would die. Say something else."

"Well, then, I wish she'd been born a little black pup, like our Snappy," I declared with an air which implied the impossibility of further concessions.

"Come, girls, let's go. I'm going home now to tell mother."

And Nancy marched off, slowly followed by the others, while I brought up the rear at a comfortable distance. Soon Maggie's sister lagged back until I had caught up with her. Looking sidewise at me, she asked :

"What would you do with Mag if she was a black pup?"

"I'd build a stone house down close to the creek, and I'd put her in that and leave her till the water raised," I declared defiantly.

"Oh, Ou-i-s-e! that's as bad as wishing she was dead."

With this remark, my companion started on a run after our friends, as if she thought me to be a dangerous creature, which, no doubt, I very nearly was.

And didn't Nancy tell my mother? and didn't I get a whipping? and didn't I go to bed that night and wish that, not only Maggie, but Nancy and all the rest of them would die? Yes, I did, and the world will say that it was a very wicked little heart

that I had in my bosom. Was it really so very wicked, I wonder? And I wonder, too, if I was responsible for the wickedness if such existed; or if my feelings were simply due to the principle which inaugurated the ever necessary struggle for self. I wonder if they were not partially an inheritance from those warlike forefathers who killed as many of their enemies as they could, and expected their God to kill the remainder.

It will be noticed that, although I feel it incumbent upon me to give an account of such faults as these, I still consider myself at liberty to mention every extenuating circumstance. I have no intention of going into the question of human accountability, for I am fully convinced that intelligent people generally will agree with me when I plead heredity and environment as an excuse for some of my childish sins, and possibly for a part of those of maturer years.

But there came a time when I forgave Maggie for the loss which she had caused me. Not that she had, in any way, made a proper restitution. I forgave her out of sympathy for her awful sorrow. Sweet little playmate! We were, neither of us, of an age to realize the terrible extent of her loss, and yet I distinctly remember of wishing that "I might go and lay myself down in the great black box, and give Maggie back her mother."

"My mother," I thought, "has several other children, but Maggie had only one mother."

Oh, the pathos of these childish heroics! Every small man and woman has fits of them. Many a young heart has been filled with the zeal of which martyrs are made, and been laughed at for expressing it. How ridiculously absurd they appear to the adult understanding; and yet how exceedingly earnest they are to their actors. The little lad who lets his brother ride down the hill on his sled, the tiny maid who looks on while baby eats her cake, together with the pilot who clings to his wheel for the sake of the passengers, have had a glimpse of the oneness of the universe.

## V.

### ALMOST A GENIUS.

It is now time that I should tell the many admiring readers of this volume about the precocity of my childish intellect. This did not reach a stage to create wonder, but was much beyond the average, and sufficient to cause remark among the people by whom I was surrounded. This was another attribute of my personality which was undoubtedly intended for the benefit of my friends, although I did manage to get some degree of pleasure from it for myself.

I did, indeed, find some small compensation for being called in from my play with the other children to "show Billy Munson, or Mr. and Mrs. Wallace how well I could spell," in the fact that they sat with open eyes while I, a child of six, spelled line after line of long words as fast as my father could pronounce them. We used the old "McGuffey Spelling-book" in those days, and father always began at "Balcony, barony," and wound up with "Phthisic." My class had not reached the page on which the last word was to be found, but it had been in Nancy's lesson, and the oddity of its orthography had caught my fancy. I was certain to pick up all I could of everything that attracted my attention,

and, of necessity, I hunted up the page and learned that lesson. This was a fortunate circumstance, as it gave me the ability to surprise my hearers sufficiently to save them from being bored.

It was of small importance that I lost my place in the game being played in the kitchen, by giving these performances. I could sit on the steps that led to the back stairs and watch the other children while I thought about how much my parents had enjoyed the applause which my youthful attainments had called forth. No doubt they appropriated the credit to themselves. Parents always do this. They glory in the accomplishments of their offspring as much as if they were their own personal acquirements. And why isn't this perfectly right and proper? The children belong to them. They are indebted to these parents for food and clothing, for intellectual and moral training; aye, for existence itself. All the comfort and happiness that comes to their lot, they owe to father and mother. And the unhappiness? Well, they bring that upon themselves.

Then there were the "speech days." I never failed to have "my piece," and I did gloat over the other children because I could learn the long lines and stanzas more readily than they. It made my inmost soul glad to be able to prompt some of my more intimate friends when they forgot their verses.

I have no doubt that I turned my long nose very visibly into the air when some Cicero of my own age (usually female) took her seat after reciting "Twinkle, twinkle, little star," or other like four-liner of less than half a dozen stanzas.

All the while I sat hopefully expectant of the time when my name should be called, and when this occurred I marched to the platform with my head in the air, and delivered my eight-lined stanzas until the last word of the fifteenth fell in gentle cadence upon the hushed air of the little schoolroom. I had a strong, clear voice, good accent for a maid of less than eight, and a fair conception of the value of emphasis; and, as the lines floated away from my lips, the close attention and rapt faces of my rustic audience gave me a taste of one of the many heavens possible to ambitious humanity.

"Will the New Year come to-night, mamma?

Will the New Year come to-night?"

Demosthenes was never more charmed at the sound of his own voice than was the little girl I used to be when she recited the touching poem which began with these lines. In those days I "knew I was a genius." Later on, I was not so fully convinced of the fact. How sad it is that our delusions fade! I suppose everybody's do? At any rate, I confess that mine have done so, and, if anyone is interested to know, I can tell him just how it feels.

All the recitations which I gave in "my young days" were not just like the one mentioned; but I have cited this one because it is the biggest performance which I can recall at this date.

"Did my ability in this line render me popular?" With my teachers and elders, yes; but not with my schoolmates and friends. How could it? I did all in my power to awaken their envy, and they, very properly, hated me for it. Children are just like grown people in this respect. I did not need to have their ill-will, but I did have more of it than was agreeable. I heard mother say to Nancy: "You are older than Ouise, and why can't you get your piece and say it like she does;" and I heard Mrs. Nelson tell Anna: "I'm afraid you'll never learn arithmetic, for just see how much Ouise is ahead of you;" and Mrs. Laughlin informed Johnny in my hearing that "she didn't see why he couldn't read 'The Lamp-lighter,' when Ouise had read it twice;" and, as a consequence, Nancy, Anna and Johnny began to wish that "Ouisse was in Jericho;" while I, flattered by the praise of the elders and galled by the sneers of the children, proceeded to flaunt my accomplishments in their faces as if I had had the making of my own capacities, and to shut my eyes to the hundred and one points in which my playmates were my superiors.

My pretty feathers had a fall, however, when I reached multiplication in written arithmetic. We did not take up written arithmetic when I was in school until we were pretty well advanced in Ray's "second book;" and this didn't happen to me until we had a new teacher at Hammondsville, and I was getting to be quite an old girl, as much as ten years, at least. I knew the tables and could tell them off glibly enough, but I struck a breaker when I came to writing out a multiplication by ten, one hundred, and like numbers.

I had grasped the idea that "ten units of one denomination make one of the next higher" and the possibilities of its application, when I had passed through addition and subtraction, and took it for granted that it must be applied in multiplication, also. In my preparation of the lesson I had no trouble with the examples. I "got the right answer" every time, and I went to that recitation as confident as I could wish. The teacher gave each pupil a problem in Case II to solve, and, to my surprise, the others were ready with their answers before I was; but I finished up without loss of time, and sang out that "the product of 6,937 by 10 was 69,370."

"Your result is all correct," said Miss McBath, "but I fail to comprehend how you managed to get it."



"Why!" I replied, "I multiplied by nine and one and added the two together."

Such a roar of laughter, at my expense, I had never heard before, and I hope never to hear again. Try as she would, the teacher could not hide her amusement, and thus encouraged, every boy and girl in the schoolhouse, whose knowledge permitted them to see the joke, "Haw-hawed" as loud as their lungs would allow, and the smaller children giggled a soft accompaniment just for the mere pleasure of laughing in school.

That was not, however, the only time in my life when I made a wrong application of a right idea; and this is a good place to confess that I know I am, by Nature, rather too precipitate. It does not take me very long to come to a conclusion, but I sometimes find it necessary to go back and form a second. It is not pleasant to find one's self in this predicament, but I always make it a rule to face the necessity with a good grace. It is so much more creditable than to persist in a false opinion. Besides, there is some consolation for such as I. I am sure that we can form two conclusions in the time it takes some folks to reach the first one. And if one can't have accuracy it is a good thing to have speed. When Clay said that "he had rather be right than to be President of the United States," I don't believe that he meant to bar second thoughts.

## VI.

### TRouble BEHIND THE SCENES.

How well do I remember the time when Callie Morrow and I ran away from home. That was not the first time I had planned to take my destiny into my own hands. When I was less than eight years old I became disgusted with the treatment I was receiving from the family in which my lot had been cast. I had a faint impression that I did not properly belong to it. Many times I had lain awake and wondered if the people whom I called father and mother were really my own parents. I thought it just possible that they had stolen me from some wealthy people who would have bought great big dolls for me and taken me to ride on the cars—perhaps as far as Cleveland.

Cleveland was, then, the end of the world to me, except, of course, the world in the geography. At that time, there was little connection in my mind between the world on the map and the world in which Yellow Creek and Hammondsville were to be found, the world in which were trees and flowers, books and children.

But Cleveland was a reality. Some wealthy people had come from that place to our village, and I thought I knew just what it was like. To my mind

all the houses were like "The brick house," all the small girls wore white dresses and blue ribbons like Lillie Kelly and their mothers wore black silk gowns and big fur capes like her mother, while every baby had one of those sweet little buggies and a Negro girl to push it. Still, with my inborn inclination to find objections, I thought it would be better to make the carriages so the babies wouldn't have to ride backward. When I went to Cleveland, as I had no doubt I should, I meant to have this change introduced. Up to the present time I have never been there, but somebody has stolen my idea and improved the carriages in which the infant Lords and Ladies of this Republic are moved about in state.

At the time when I first decided that I could no longer endure my surroundings, I had had a large-sized battle with my unreasonable fate in an attempt to learn to sew. Mother was a most expert needlewoman and had no patience with my long stitches. Besides, Nancy was there to make bad matters worse.

"Just see Nancy's hemming," mother would say, "why can't you do it like that? And look at her patchwork, how small the seams and stitches are."

"But her corners don't fit good," I asserted vindictively, bent on defending myself at this new point

of attack, from the guns loaded with Nancy's virtues.

"No, they don't fit as well as yours, but when you can fit them so much better, why can't you sew them better, too?"

"Well, then, when she can sew them better than I can, why don't she fit them better?" I asked, quite forgetful of the respect due to my mother.

"See here, Miss Ouise, I'll not have any of your sauce. Take the stitches out of that strip and sew it all over again."

With this command, mother took up the baby and went out upon the front porch. Nancy, not having to remodel her sewing, soon followed, and I was left alone with my rebellious heart. I worked furiously at the stitches for some time, and then my eyes got so full of tears that I cut the muslin in several places. I knew that this was multiplying evils, and began to wonder how I was to escape the consequence of my awkwardness and folly.

Like all other ills, the longer I nursed my trouble the more unbearable it became, and before nightfall had sent the family into the house, I had evolved a scheme for freeing myself from what I supposed to be a great injustice, and for bringing a well merited punishment upon its perpetrators. The next morning I would run away instead of going to school. We lived on the line of the Cleveland and

Pittsburg railroad, and I was fully determined that, when I reached the crossing, I would start up the track and never come back. I thought that, perhaps, I might find my real parents; or, at the very least, someone who could give me the facts in the case. And, even if nobody laid a claim to me, I had no doubt that when I came to "the big brick houses," someone would take me in.

But the light of the following morning caused me to waver in my purpose. I looked at my mother and thought what a beautiful woman she was and how it would spoil her face when she had to cry because I was lost, and I began to wish very much that I didn't have to go off and leave her. But I ate my breakfast and prepared for school with unusual care. Didn't I want to look as well as possible? Though I was such a young thing, the womanly desire to make a good impression was strong within me, and I took particular pains in tying my "head-band," and persuaded mother to let me wear a clean apron. When she consented, I felt worse than ever at the thought of the pain which I was forced to inflict upon her.

I went slowly across the street, passed the village store, and reluctantly approached the railroad crossing. Standing upon the track, I parleyed with my resolution for a long time. I began to be afraid that it was a long way to Cleveland. "Should I go, or

stay?" It had come to that question. When dressing for school I had felt that I must go whether or not I wanted to do so. Now I began to feel that I might stay if I would. How I wished someone would come up at that moment and assure me that, if I would condescend to remain at Hammondsville, I need never learn to sew unless I desired. But nobody came, and still I lingered with my face up the track.

At last a brazen note rang out on the air. It was the school-bell. I looked toward home and saw mother standing in the doorway. The bell rang louder and, whirling, I ran up the steep, rocky road as if a hundred furies were after me.

I had not forgotten about this abortive attempt at elopement, on that night when Callie and I laid our scheme to go out into the world and make our fortunes, but I told myself that "I was such a little girl then, and now I was almost a woman. I would be twelve years old in a little less than a year."

Callie and I had thrown a small boy from the foot-bridge into the creek. It had not hurt him to any extent beyond wetting his clothes, and his toilet being a very meager one, the damage was certainly slight. But that circumstance did not lessen our punishment nor mitigate the scorn with which we

remembered being whipped "on little Jimmy Bridge's account."

So it happened that one golden summer morning, we took up a basket apiece and started for "the mulberry trees on Maldon's Hill." We walked directly and rapidly to that spot, for we had said to ourselves that "we must do this so as not to have told a story." Here we sat down and rehearsed our plans. We were to go to Wellsville, where Callie, who was something of a musician for one so young, was to begin the performance by singing; after which I would "say one of my speeches." Then she "would sing again, and the people would clap their hands until she came back and sang a third time." Again I would follow her, and be called back, too. After my encore we would sing the Doxology together, and the man at the door would give us all the money and we would go to the big hotel that father had pointed out to me when I went with him to buy leather.

"It'll be awful to have to sing the Doxology with you, Ouise," said Callie piteously, "but I s'pose I'll have to try. They all come out together at the last, you know."

Poor Callie! Anyone who has ever heard me try to sing will appreciate how badly she must have felt, and might, with propriety, extend their sympathies to our expected audience.

The length of time we sat there discussing our future will never be known, but it was long enough for us to come to the conclusion that we were hungry, and we made a small feast upon the bits of bread and cake we had managed to smuggle away with us. Being somewhat refreshed with this repast, we unrolled our dresses. We had brought one apiece. Callie had her pink lawn, and I had borrowed Nancy's white dimity.

"Ouisse, that dress will be too long for you," declared Callie, as she surveyed the dimity with critical eyes.

"Do you think it will?" I asked dubiously.

"Of course it will. Put it on and see," she returned.

"But I can't put it on here! out of doors!"

"Yes, you can. Nobody ever comes up on the hill except when the mulberries are ripe. You see there isn't any now, and we might have known that there wouldn't be any for a week, if we had only taken time to think about it."

Convinced of the truth of her remark, I slipped off my gingham and got into the dimity in short order. Callie thought there was no doubt about its being too long, but I declared that "it was no such thing."

"It's longer than my lawn," she insisted.

"Put yours on and see," I suggested.



My dress, or rather Nancy's, was actually six inches longer than the dainty pink lawn which I had considered the climax of beauty, so, after some hard thinking, I said:

"I know what I'll do! I'll put a tuck in it when we get to town."

"But you make such big stitches," objected Callie, who was a very tasteful child, and, hence, determined that I should not bring disgrace upon our "troupe" by a faulty costume.

"Well, then, I'll get Leah Pipe to do it."

Miss Pipe was a seamstress who occasionally came from the larger town to our village, and did sewing for our mothers.

This arrangement being entirely satisfactory, our next thought was to have a sort of dress rehearsal.

I gave my best selection with Callie for an audience, and then she stood up to sing. She got through the first bar, or two, and stopped suddenly.

"Oh, Ouse, what's the use of singing to you," she cried; "you won't know whether it's done good or not."

I had bravely faced her remark about our singing the Doxology together, because I fully understood that I couldn't sing; but this was too much.

"I guess I can hear good singing just as well as you can, Callie Morrow," I blurted out. "I'm very sure you know that the man who visited the school

and talked to us about singing, said that 'I could keep better time than anybody else in school.' "

"Yes! but what's time without tune?" asked Callie scornfully.

"Tune or no tune, nobody's going to care for your singing; and I just want to tell you that I'm not going to say all my speeches for the people and then give you half the money."

She made a dash at me, but I dodged her, crying:

"Look out, or I'll spoil your old pink dress for you."

"Will you?" she sneered; "I guess not. I'm going to run home and tell your mother that you've stolen Nancy's dimity."

And away went Callie after the manner of most amateur detectives.

"I hope she'll tear her dress," I prayed aloud, as I prepared to get back into my gingham. By the time I had succeeded, the girl was again at my side, trying to roll up her lawn and to get into her other dress at the same time.

"What's the matter?" I asked, seeing that she was terribly frightened about something.

"Ouisse, Ouisse! your pap's coming up the hill. What'll we do?"

"Go on to Wellesville, baby," I answered contemptuously.

"Yes! I think I see you going to Wellsville after he catches you."

If she thought she saw me going on, that was as near to the reality as she ever came. Father was in no pleasant mood. He said that "It was two o'clock in the afternoon, and mother was frightened out of her wits, and Nancy was sick and couldn't come hunt us." But when he saw the wardrobe we had brought along, and learned what our intentions had been, he laughed heartily and agreed to get our dresses home for us so that we might not be found out and chastised for our escapade. We hurried on ahead of him, and he managed it somehow. At least, we were never taken to task for running away, and Callie repented of her threat to tell mother that "I stole Nancy's dress."

## VII.

### "YOU COULDN'T KISS A BOY."

Once in my life I thought I was a poet. This is a disease, which, like mumps and measles, is not confined to Old Maids. Sooner or later everybody has an attack of it. I think I escaped it until I had reached my thirteenth year. Then I had it bad; but, fortunately for the readers of this book, I managed to survive the attack. The first symptoms appeared on the evening of a children's party at my home. It happened that I had "given a pawn." I could have avoided this penalty if I had desired; but, oh, the possibilities of that pawn-selling! they were too great for common honesty. So, when only partially blindfolded, I happened to catch my older sister, I rubbed my hands over her head and dress and said that it was Anna Nelson, in spite of the fact that Anna was dressed in the softest of lawns and Nancy wore one of mother's old-fashioned silks that had been made over for the occasion. If I had been charged with telling a falsehood, I should have declared that "I didn't say I believed it was Anna." Hadn't I stated my guess so as not to tell a downright lie? And, in guessing, one has a perfect right to steer as wide of the truth as he pleases. I always made it a point not to tell a wilful lie in making a

direct statement; and, as much of my conversation was made up of guess-work, there was little danger of my being caught in a serious prevarication.

At last the seller came to my pawn, and I was sentenced to "make a rhyme." It was supposed that a girl's rhyme should call for a kiss from one of the boys, but I didn't make that kind. I must confess that, at times, it takes a great deal of courage to ask for the things that one wants most; so I stood up in the corner and, instead of the conventional article, gave them the following:

"Here am I. There are you.

I wouldn't kiss a boy if I wanted to."

I frankly own that I still consider that to have been a pretty fair performance for a girl of a dozen years, but I managed to get the worst of the bargain after all, for Joe Pressley, who had never forgiven me for the manner in which I treated his letter, sang out:

"Yes, here are we; and there are you;

And you couldn't kiss a boy if you wanted to."

Really, I suppose I couldn't. At least I didn't. The young people all laughed at Joe's sally; but I was so certain that their mirth had been called forth by the sell on me, that I blushed furiously, flounced awkwardly into a chair, and rendered myself so perfectly ridiculous that it would have taken more cour-

age than is commonly possessed by gentlemen under sixteen to have gotten within ten feet of me.

- It was too bad the way it turned out. Many girls could have gone through that little scene and been kissed by every boy in the room. But I wasn't that kind of a girl. My mouth was too large to pout prettily; blushes made my face an ugly, fiery red instead of giving it a rosy tint, and I was too overgrown to skip out of my place very gracefully. So it happened that I gave my pawn, made my rhyme, got badly bored, and *almost* wished there hadn't been any party.

- Notwithstanding the disastrous consequences of that first puny effort at versification, I was not deterred from trying it over again when I went to hunt the cow on the evening of the following day. There being no one within hearing distance, I said the lines over aloud without fear of any cruel parodies. Snappy, who, some years ago, had been "a little black pup," had died a few days before and furnished me with a subject of about the usual importance.

"Oh, Snappy, dear, with eyes of blue,  
 With bushy tail and heart so true,  
 We buried you down by Yellow Creek  
 And marked your grave with a big red brick.

"And, Snappy, dear, in Heaven so bright,  
I know your hair'll be soft and white,  
And when I come to meet you, dear,  
I hope Joe Pressley won't be there."

By the time I had this effort well fixed in my mind, with the determination to write it down as soon as I reached home, I had the fortune, good or bad, to be overtaken by Charlie Nelson. At the first notice of his approach, I remembered that he had been one of the first to laugh when Joe made light of my rhyme, and the recollection sent the blood to my face with a rush. This made me angry in earnest, and I tossed my head into the air with the intention of letting him go by me unnoticed. But Charlie was several years older than I, and had the good sense to pay no attention to my unfriendly attitude. He came up beside me and in sympathetic tones, said:

"I say, Ouisse, it was mean as sin in Joe Pressley to do what he did last night."

I looked at him with some suspicion as to his meaning, but he smiled kindly into my face and added:

"Oh, I mean it! Of course I laughed because it was funny, but I wouldn't have done it myself—not even for the sake of making folks laugh."

Charlie looked so honest that I could not help

thinking he was in earnest. I remembered, too, that some years before, he had brought me a bunch of crab apple blossoms when I was sick and could not go out with the village children in search of flowers.

These thoughts were quite sufficient to fire my young muse, and when the cow had been duly delivered over to Nancy at the stable door, I ran down to the creek where the great sycamore stood, and, sitting down on its bank, began to build lines of which Charlie was the hero.

This was the beginning. The end has not arrived yet. The worst enemy I ever had was the editor of a local paper, published at the county seat, who printed some of my verses when I was about fifteen years old. This course did not cause me to waste much paper or postage, for mother wouldn't allow that; but it did fire my fancy and cause me to neglect the dish-washing and other work while I filled my memory with line on line of the dullest, prosiest kind of stuff imaginable. It was not that I ever had a really poetic thought, but because I loved the measure and the rhyme. I think that I might have learned to write fairly good prose if that editor had known only the proper use of the wastebasket. Fortunately for my peace of mind, the old files of the newspaper were destroyed by fire many years ago.

But the worst of it all came from the fact that .



a habit is *a habit*, and a hard thing to shake off. In this particular I fear that I am even worse than the average mortal, and I still suffer an occasional relapse into the mania. Yet, like the poor inebriate, when I find myself able to sober up, I make a thousand good resolutions, and destroy all the remaining marks of my weakness. A few times—not very many—a kind-hearted editor, from a mistaken sense of pity, has put it past my power to entirely hide the proofs of my weakness. It is sad; but I forgive them.

## VIII.

### HELP THAT DIDN'T HELP.

I never believed myself to be very bad. I never thought that my conduct as an individual was more reprehensible than the average. Although I made no pretensions to angelship, I was equally certain that I was not a devil. The doctrine of "total depravity" might be true in the main, but it did not fit my case. When I look back over my life, I think that this estimate was pretty nearly correct. I begin to have considerable confidence in my own judgment, and, should I live long enough, no doubt I shall consider myself a seer of no mean ability.

But I have been guilty of misdemeanors. At times I have deviated from the proper course. If I were disposed to spend time in useless regrets I should shed tears over the hours I wasted at school after I had reached my thirteenth year. If circumstances had been propitious, I ought to have been a fine scholar. Don't call this egotism. I take no credit for whatever natural abilities I may have possessed any more than I shoulder all the blame for my comparative failure to make the best of them.

Teachers and parents are no more perfect than children. They greatly enjoy the presence of the apt pupil who saves them work and wins them

credit, but they do not always ask whether it is not possible that they owe an extra duty to these very children because of their aptness. The brighter the pupil, the more attention of certain kinds does he require. The dull boy will not go far astray. Slow people cannot get far out of the beaten path. As it requires more skill to aim a Krupp gun than an air rifle, so it requires more intelligence to direct aright the child with large capacities.

The slow pupil will scarcely get far beyond the mere rudiments of an education, and there is no question about what shall be placed before him. It will require all his time to keep up with his classes, and he will not be likely to wander into forbidden and dangerous paths. But what shall we offer to the bright boy? into what avenues shall we direct his surplus energy? Possibly, in this twentieth century, there is more thought being given to this subject, but in my school days it was argued that the dull boy should have more than an equal share of the teacher's efforts. If Nature had understood that this premium was to be placed upon dull children she would, no doubt, have turned out more of them.

Yes, I was rather a bad sort of girl when I was in my early teens; but, in one way or another, most such girls are bad if their conduct be graded with regard to future profit. I am very sure that I kept

up with my classes in school, and frequently helped other pupils to keep up, too, but I didn't have enough work to keep me busy, and, consequently, was guilty of many useless and some harmful practices.

If it were not for the profits I am to have from the sale of this book I should wish that I had a dollar each for the buckets of water I have helped to carry to the schoolhouse. We always went in couples. Sometimes the other half of the couple was a boy. We never hurried. What was the use? The pupil who loved study did not need to hurry; and the one who did not, was only too glad to keep away from it. So we dragged the bucket along between us, always spilling a part of the water, and occasionally, all of it. In the latter case, there was the fun of going back for more. Fun! yes, indeed, it was fun. At that time I should have declared that the children who were being educated in the large city buildings, and got their drinks at the hydrants, were missing half the good of school-life because they couldn't have the fun of "going after a bucket of water."

After killing as much time as we possibly could, on the way between the schoolhouse and Nelson's well, I frequently managed to kill about fifteen more minutes in "passing the water." The teacher argued, I presume, that I had as much spare time

as anybody, and seldom refused my petition. Besides, I didn't make any more disorder in doing the work than another pupil would do, which, however, is no very great praise. As a matter of course I tickled the little girls, made the larger ones laugh, and tipped the cup for the boys; but all that was on the usual program, and subjected me to very little censure. In my memory's eye, I can see myself, my long, willowy body swinging itself lazily around among the seats, while my brain concocted schemes for my own amusement, or dreamed futures for the various pupils.

One of my favorite mental pastimes was to enact a law that children might marry, couple off the boys and girls about me, witness the ceremonies, and set them up to housekeeping in some great city. Naturally, I took my choice of the boys in the start, and provided a house for us, whose grandeur somewhat eclipsed that of the ones furnished to the other couples. Sometimes I arranged that we should all go together to a new country and build a town of our own, and that "me and my man" should govern the others—for their own good, of course. I always meant plenty of good for everybody and a little more for myself.

If I had given up these dreams when the pupils had been served with water, it might not have been so bad, but the business of creating and caring for

a community went on after I was seated, unless somebody whispered a more entertaining subject into my ear.

Occasionally these whispers took the form of "Please, Ouisse, help me to get this problem." I don't remember, now, that I ever refused this help; but there were cases in which I wish I had. I have a keen recollection of some instances in which my kindness was much abused.

One would-be young lady, who was some two years my senior, used to toll me off with her to study our geography lesson. It was summer, and the teacher would frequently allow two of us to go and sit together under the trees for half an hour, supposably to assist each other in our studies. At such times, this Miss Meity and I would go over the lesson together, one reading the questions and the other finding and stating the answers. When once over them, my lesson was learned, and the rest of the time was devoted to her benefit. On a particular day—particular from the fact that it was a sort of review lesson from which the teacher was to grade us for the month—we seated ourselves under our favorite maple, and opened our books.

"Ouisse," said Miss Meity, "you ask the questions to-day, and I'll get the answers."

Prior to that time, she had not been willing to make this arrangement, but I fancied she had taken

a notion to be extra kind, and readily acquiesced to the proposition. I am angry now when I think of it, and say to myself, "You idiot, you never could see into other people's motives an inch farther than your own long nose."

Without a thought of anything but a perfect lesson, I took my place in the class when "Mitchell's Intermediate Geography" was called. By virtue of obtaining the only perfect grade at the previous examination, I sat at the head of the class, and Miss Meity sat next below me. All went well for a time, and then I was rudely awakened from my fancied security by the teacher's saying:

"The next pupil will please mention the important rivers of Asia."

"Didn't I give them right?" I asked in great consternation. Then, without waiting for an answer, I began running over them, "Ural, Volga, Don, Dneiper, Dneister——"

There I paused. Miss Meity was grinning. No, it was not a smile. I am prejudiced, to be sure, but no smile ever looked like that. It was a grin and no more.

"Go on, Miss Meity," commanded Mr. McArle.

"Ural, Volga, Don, Dneiper, Bog, Dneister——"

"There isn't any Bog there," I cried.

"Silence!" thundered the irate instructor, who,

though not a bad sort of man, had no better control over his temper than he had over us.

I said no more in self-defense, and for the next month sat second in the class. When I reached my desk after the lesson was finished, I brought out my book and looked for that lost river. No, it wasn't lost. It was in the book. I closed that geography and put it back in its place, with a visage that would undoubtedly have made vinegar taste sweet. Miss Meity leaned over the back of my seat and whispered:

"You forgot, didn't you, Ouise?"

"You didn't tell me that one," I retorted.

"Oh, yes, I did," she answered purringly.

"You lie!" I hissed almost aloud.

"What's going on there?" inquired Mr. McArle.

I turned my head sulkily toward my desk, and heard Miss Meity sigh:

"Something awful."

The teacher came back and insisted on knowing what the trouble was about. I looked stormily at my book, and refused to answer. As might have been expected, he appealed to Miss Meity.

"She said I lied," came the reply in a tone which implied that the saintly creature was afraid the words would burn her tongue.

"Well, she did," I snapped viciously.

"Louisa! Louisa!" exclaimed Mr. McArle depre-



catingly. Then he braced himself up as if he were about to make battle with a regiment of soldiers, and added: "You go stand by my desk and I'll talk to you after school is dismissed."

Cry? Not a bit of it! I never cry when I'm mad. I leave that part of the business for married women. Folks might have known then that I would be an Old Maid, but nobody ever took the hint. At least, they didn't say anything about it till later. But Miss Meity cried, and sent me a little note begging me to admit that "I had forgotten."

The last pupil was out on the playground. I could hear their many voices loudly discussing my conduct. I gritted my teeth. That is a habit I have. Then Mr. McArle asked me for an account of my conduct.

When I had concluded, he walked rapidly across the room for some seconds, and then came and laid his hand upon my arm, saying:

"It can't be helped now, Louisa, and for the future you had better study your own lessons."

Consolation! Indeed! Just at that minute I hated him as much as I did Miss Meity. I saw that I was never to get justice. I did not care so much for the lost place, but I wanted the wrong righted before the school. Poor ignorant child that I was! I had not learned how very many such wrongs go without righting in this sad old world, and then and there

I decided that "when I raised my children, they should have justice if I had to hang half the teachers and pupils in Hammondsville."

That no such catastrophe has happened in that peaceful village is not proof that justice reigns supreme, but that I haven't any children.

That was many years ago, but I have never been sorry that I told Miss Meity she lied. I suppose this is because of the obdurate material of which Old Maids are constructed; but, if being a wife would have caused me to repent for making that statement of a truth, I am glad that I wasn't cut after that pattern.

## IX.

### MENTAL TREMENS.

Many of those hours, wasted in and out of school, were spent in the reading of novels. By this I do not mean to intimate that there is no profit from the perusal of any fiction. I have no thought of crying down novels in general, because I have written a novel myself, and am going to have it published, too. But there is such a variety of styles in fiction that I very much doubt the propriety of allowing young people to read it in a haphazard manner. Indeed, I am fully convinced of the impropriety of the course which permitted me to become a prey to circumstances in this matter.

I brought a taste for literature into the world with me, and began to gratify it as soon as I learned to read. My father was the owner of a few books and a subscriber to at least one periodical. These, with the weekly "Sunday school book," proved sufficient until I had passed a dozen years. Then the lack of sufficient school work and a mammoth dislike for the routine of home duties threw me upon my own resources for mental pabulum; and the fiction which circulated among my mother's friends was resorted to as a means of furnishing the needed supply.

Here is where I hold some person, or persons, al-

most criminally culpable. If it were not for the fact that the time has not yet come when we may discard ignorance from the list of extenuating circumstances, I should say that they were altogether so. I would have read history and biography if my attention had been directed to them, with as great avidity as I did "The Underground Mysteries of the City of Brotherly Love," or "The Rescue of Pocohathagamy, the Indian Maiden." But as it had been decreed that "beggars shouldn't be choosers," I humbly took what was given me when I asked a friend for "something to read."

I was, indeed, fortunate enough to get some wheat with the chaff. Shall I ever forget dear old "Grandmother" Coil, who loaned me "The Lady of the Lake?" or Mrs. Kelley's gift of "David Copperfield" and "Ethics of the Dust?"

But much of what I found to read was of the Indian-fighting, scalp-lifting and gauntlet-running; or the baby-changing, title-stealing and lord-marrying style. Worthy books in their way? Oh, yes! very edifying to gray-bearded men who have worn their lives away at the desk, bench, or plow; or to women who have never been "rescued" from the horrors of the wash-tub or sewing-machine. There need be no fear of inflaming the imagination of such people. The realities have steeled them against abnormal ideas of life. They know that infant duchesses are

not likely to be hidden away in the cabins of umbrella menders, and that every young man who makes his home on the frontier does not have an opportunity to rescue beautiful maidens from the clutches of savage Red Men or more savage British soldiery. They know that moral sentiment and seas of blood don't go well together.

But how was I to know all this? I had never heard literature discussed, and did not know that these were crude efforts at painting a condition of which the writers sometimes knew very little more than I did; and when I read of the girl who was a prisoner among the Indians and carried a silver bugle with which she warned the whites of their dangers, I seriously contemplated exchanging my small hoard of keepsake coins for a bugle of that identical mould, and going to lead a wild life among the forests and lakes of Minnesota.

But the end came about the time I was fourteen. Mrs. Smith had loaned me an apronful of stories of the most approved earthquake pattern and, it being vacation, I had devoured a trio of them in six days and two Sundays. Number three was occupied mostly by a hero who had a villainous cousin and a habit of running into the arms of a band of desperadoes every time he opened a door or passed an alley. On the eighth night I read until mother forced me off to bed, leaving the poor fellow with

his foot on a trap which was to precipitate him into a cellar filled with burly men in great rough coats, black masks, and "six-shooters."

I think I must have dozed off to sleep, but when I roused I was sitting bolt upright in my bed in the little attic room, screaming "Back, back!" in a tone which disturbed my parents in the room below. I caught the sound of their conversation, and cried out again. Then I heard somebody coming up the stairs, and held my breath. I had a feeling that there was something wrong with me, but the room was pitchy dark, and I could not collect my senses; so, when father called from the head of the stairs, his voice sounded to my strained ears like a note from the bottom of some great pit, and caused me to give a last despairing cry of terror.

Then mother came with a light, and I recovered my senses.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Oh, dear!" I sighed, "I thought I was in one of those secret passages."

"It's those infernal books," declared father.

I gave vent to a little hysterical laugh. I saw it all perfectly. But I was myself again, and did not wait for further questions.

"Yes, it's that book, and I'll never finish it. And I'll never read another yellow-backed novel as long as I live."

On the following day I carried Mrs. Smith's books home without making an effort to select the corn from the husks, and my parents had no thought that it was their duty to make the selection for me.

I have since been very thankful that all the publishers of paper-bound fiction did not confine themselves to yellow covers. Besides, there are different shades of yellow. Moreover, it was the quality of the contents more than the binding, which I had in mind when I made that promise to father, and I have a very comfortable consciousness that neither in letter nor in spirit have I seriously infringed upon my vow.

It may be argued that I was "soft-headed," or "weak-nerved," to let a bit of exciting fiction throw me into a condition so nearly bordering upon insanity, but I was no such thing. I shall defend myself, even in a Confession. But I was *soft-hearted*, and had nerves that were keyed away up in the scale, and, what was more to blame than the qualities mentioned, I was possessed of a vivid imagination and an intense sympathy. I lived the lives of the leading characters a little more fully than does the average reader. These facts, added to the exceeding monotony of life in a small village, caused me to completely lose myself in the stories which I read.

Before the reader begins to cast slurs upon an

inexperienced village girl for becoming a little dazed over a piece of fire-eating fiction, let him remember the times when he has been unable to sleep "for thinking about the way that villainous uncle attempted to dispose of the witnesses to his niece's identity."

After that "spell of tremens," as father called it, I read no stories for some time. My parents became roused and made an effort to find something suitable for me to read. An old gentleman, who, for some unaccountable reason, had taken a fancy to me, kindly supplied me with books from his library. This literature was colored by his prejudices, and of a sort that some would think was not exactly suited to the needs of a young girl; but certain it is that it never kept me hanging over a black pit when I should have been asleep.

Since that time I have read hundreds of novels, and give them credit with much of my best sentiment and aspiration, but I don't pick them up and bury myself in them without some assurance that they are not exactly as bad as a dose of Kentucky Bourbon. Still, I have been led into the perusal of a number that I would not recommend to the darling girls who sometimes call me "Aunt Ouisse," "Mamma Ouisse," and other like gratifying terms.



## X.

### DEAR OLD DAN.

During the summer after my sixteenth birthday, my mother kept a boarder. I had known the man all my life. He had been a sort of fixture in the village for twenty years. Many small places have just such characters, namely: a bachelor who has no claim on anybody, and on whom nobody has any claim. Frequently, this is fortunate for everybody except the bachelor.

But "Old Dan" of Hammondsville "wasn't a bad sort of fellow." This was what the village folks declared to mother when he applied to her for board. His name was Daniel Laughlin, but he was "Old Dan" to everyone, from the tiny tot on the doorstep to the grey-beards who worked in the mines which he superintended. He was a man sixty-five years of age. His hair and beard were of a snowy whiteness which gave him a venerable appearance far beyond that which his years, face and figure would indicate. He had once owned a farm adjoining the town, but for some reason it had passed out of his possession. All the inhabitants of the place knew something of his history, but everybody admitted that nobody knew it all. In fact, there were hints of a great secret in his life; but if such existed

no one ever found it out. He was just a plain, kind-hearted, old man, with a somewhat rough exterior and more than ordinary intelligence, as I learned when I came to know him intimately and understandingly.

I had not approved of the plan of taking a boarder, and it was some time before I gave Dan much attention; but he made his way into my friendship one evening when mother and I were having some difference about the arrangement of my hair. I had been in the habit of wearing it in a single plat, but she had persuaded me to divide it into two and loop the end of each to the base of the other, tying them with ribbons.

"I don't like it. It's twice as much work to comb it this way."

I rendered judgment on the experiment in these words, but mother returned to the attack with:

"You are absolutely too lazy to comb your own hair. You can wear it just as you like, but I'm sure that's the way Lillie Kelly's visitors had theirs fixed, and they know the style."

"But, mother, Leah Pipe said that one plat was just as much style as two, and I don't have to wear my hair like those Conkey girls unless I want to."

Here, Old Dan, who was passing through the room, seized the condemned plats and shook my head vigorously, saying:

"And I wouldn't do it, either. I'd have a mind of my own, like you have, and I'd dress as I pleased. But I would have the two plats and the ribbons, and I'll tell you why."

Here he stopped and looked at me with an air that said: "If you want to hear it."

Surprised at the old man's interest, and filled with curiosity, I put the question:

"Well, why?"

"Just because you look best that way," he replied. "With your hair laid smoothly round your face so, you remind one of the Madonna pictures."

"Pshaw!" I cried scornfully, "who ever heard of a Madonna with a big nose?"

Dan laughed heartily, and turning to mother, said:

"She don't flatter herself a bit, does she?" Then to me he continued: "Now look here, my girl, because one can't be a swan, there isn't any use in being a goose. If I were in your place, I'd be as much like a swan as possible. You'll find it to be lots of satisfaction."

"Are you trying to be a swan?" I asked, eyeing him critically.

With a kindly smile, the old man returned:

"Yes, trying the very best I can. But it's harder work, now, for me to show the best that is in me than it would have been at your age. You see,

child, my old Scotch father made me believe that a man must be either a saint or a devil. I knew myself too well to think I could ever be a saint. So the doctrine had a bad effect on me, and I got so far away from swanship that it is slow work getting back."

Like a flood of light, the difference between Old Dan and the miners who worked under him flashed upon me. He was always scrupulously clean after work hours. His white hair and beard were never allowed to go unkempt and shaggy. He never failed to lift his hat when he addressed mother and the neighbor women. He read much, and it was the lesser portion of his time that was spent among the men who lounged about the village store. How far had he gone in the wrong direction? And what a pity it was that the world couldn't see the best there was in his nature!

"And you really think, Dan, that the two plats make an improvement on me?" I queried after the slight pause occasioned by my making this mental picture of the man.

"Sure enough, child; sure enough! and Old Dan thinks he's a pretty fair judge of good looks, too."

On the following morning I arranged my hair in two plats, and Dan smiled approvingly when he appeared at breakfast. A few days afterward he came in from the store and gave me two yards of beauti-

ful cardinal-red ribbon "to tie that twilight hair with," he said.

"Twilight hair?" I repeated in questioning tones.

"Yes, twilight," he answered. "It's not black enough for night, but just about the color of eight o'clock these evenings."

It was a peculiar experience; that of a young girl, going to an old man who had neither wife nor daughter, to ask what she must wear; but I did it all that summer, and often afterward. Dan decided the color of my summer dress and the shape of the cheap straw that served me for a "summer hat." I obeyed him implicitly because he always gave me a reason for every selection, and that reason invariably had reference to myself. He didn't ask me to wear pink because "he had seen so much of it when he was on a visit to a larger town," but directed me to the purchase of what proved to be "the only buff gingham seen on the streets of Hammondsville" that summer.

For the first time in my life I had the pleasure of feeling that I was being governed for my own good. Undoubtedly, many people had cared for my welfare, but they had seemed afraid to let me know it. I am sure that some others had seen good qualities in me, but they never appeared to consider them worthy of mention; while there were many who did

not hesitate to proclaim my faults from the house-top.

Not so, Daniel Laughlin. He frequently gave me a word of praise over some item of dress or conduct, and, occasionally a hint of criticism; but his fertile brain was always ready with excuses for my shortcomings. Nothing which was of importance to me, from the color of a ribbon to the qualities which my future husband should possess, was ever too trivial for his consideration.

I never received an explicit statement that the old man understood what he was doing for me, but I know that he did. His quick eyes saw that it galled me to be continually ordered to follow somebody's lead. He saw that I was not disposed to move along tamely in the rut of social propriety, and that, in getting out of it, I was in danger of going over the bank. I think he knew that the great highway of human welfare was broad enough for every girl born into it to travel it safely to the end, and not lose her individuality, if she were given only a fair chance and a little help at the outset.

Once, when Nancy was urging me to read a book entitled "Woman's Duties to Society and the Church," Dan stopped her with:

"Let the girl alone, Nancy, she's been told enough about the duties she owes to God and the world. Let her learn the duties she owes to herself."

"People don't need to be taught to look out for themselves," replied Nancy decidedly.

"Some people don't," admitted Dan, looking straight at his newspaper.

My sister's perceptions were very obtuse when it came to the point of a sarcasm aimed at herself. I knew this, and giving myself no uneasiness on her account, turned my attention to my old friend.

"What are people's duties to themselves, Dan?" I asked.

"The first duty one owes to himself is to get all the possible happiness out of life," came the reply. "I don't know all the rules any more than you do, but that's the first and most important of them."

"But isn't that what everybody is trying to do?" I never hesitated to ask questions. I presume that is a peculiarity of our Sisterhood; but, wise as he was, it was one of the signs Dan had not learned to read. At least, he made no comment upon it, but said:

"Not a bit of doubt about that, girl. Everybody has learned the first duty, but too many of them stop there, and then they are just as likely as not to bring up in misery. They have learned what to do but not how to do it. That is the second duty: To fit one's self for performing the first. You see, happiness depends on conditions; and a man can't go out in life and pick it up whenever he wants to,

any more than he can pick up a fortune by sitting down on the creek bank with a fishing rod."

"And what is the rule for fitting one's self, Dan?" I asked in breathless interest.

"Well, as near as I can tell it is: Make the best of conditions. We are just what we are, and the world is just what it is; and the more capable we are of fitting the two together the more certain we are of obtaining the desired result."

"So, you would have us forever hewing ourselves down to fit into the little holes where folks want to put us, would you?"

I was beginning to be afraid that he would want me to read Nancy's book after all.

The old man thoughtfully scratched his cheek, and stared across the street.

"No, that's not it," he returned; "I'd have each person select a hole for himself, and make it as big as ever he could possibly do without unjustly crowding into the holes belonging to other people. See?"

Yes, I began to see; but I wanted to hear more, and asked:

"But how are we to know when we are making the best of conditions?"

"Well, you do beat all to ask questions! and that one is pretty hard to answer. In fact, we can't always tell. We have to go it blind a good deal. That is one of the conditions. But we must get what



light we can, and then make good use of it. Now, for instance, we know that the world loves beauty. We love beauty ourselves; and though it wouldn't pay to cut off our long nose because it is ugly, it is perfectly right to do our hair in two plats because it improves our looks. It's a good plan to do all we can to please others, so long as it doesn't interfere with our comfort or self-respect. That's the place to draw the line. If we amount to anything, there will be plenty of places where there will be friction between us and the world; but it is a good idea just to go on doing our share of rubbing and make as little noise about it as possible. If we are right, the world will find it out some day; and if we should ever happen to discover that we were wrong, we'll be glad we didn't make any fuss about it."

Dan changed his boarding place when winter came. His sojourn in my home was one of the most fortunate circumstances of my life. His hints opened new avenues of thought about self and society; and, although I have not been able to practice his philosophy as I would have liked to do, I have found it helpful as far as tested. If the old man could have seen just a little deeper into my case, he might possibly have fitted his instructions to suit it better; but at that time, neither he nor I had a single doubt that I should be married and a grandmother before I reached my present age.

## XI.

### GOOD-BY NANCY; GOOD-BY JOE.

I began school with the other pupils in the fall ter Old Dan left us, but I did not finish the term. nancy had managed to get herself engaged; and in ew of this fact, mother thought it best that I ould stay at home and assist with the housework id give my sister a better opportunity to sew, ilt, and do other things preparatory to going into house of her own.

I did not take much interest in the fortunes of e bride-to-be. I new that, married or single, she ould be the same old Nancy. I felt a little thrill i joy at the prospect of having her out of my way. was subject to an impression that Nancy was owding me. At times her presence fairly stifled e, especially when she was making an extra dis- ay of her sainthood. She had a favorite hymn hich ran thus:

"I'm but a traveler here  
Heaven is my home.  
Earth is a desert drear,  
Heaven is my home."

I have listened to her singing those stanzas over id over until the air of our little home became blue

with horrors surrounding humanity, and I heartily wished she would go "home" and let the rest of us feel a little of the sunshine of life. The trouble with Nancy was that she was born half a century behind her time, but I suppose she couldn't help that.

Now, however, she was going to marry and go into a home that I had little expectation would prove a heaven; yet I felt no regret as I pictured the failure of her hopes. Anything to put an end to the friction which always showed itself when we came in contact was a welcome event. When I was some years younger, I had found myself wishing that she and I, instead of being sisters, had "just been married, and then I could have gotten a divorce."

Let no one think that I hadn't any love for this sister of mine. I did love her as much as we can possibly love the disagreeable, and fully as much as she loved me. But we were as uncongenial as the equator and the poles, and it was just as impossible to bring us together. Although I had never reasoned it out thus at that time, I knew it just as well as I do now. So I was glad that she was going to marry. I felt that, possibly, that might be a little more creditable than getting the divorce I had desired, and far more practical than going to Heaven.

In view of the prospect of being able to occupy

an increase of space in our home, I made no protest against leaving school. Once I had had a dream of going to college, but I had now sufficient understanding to see that it was an impossibility, and thought I had as well devote myself to something else as to be killing time in the village school.

On the very day on which I had apprised my schoolmates that "this was my last week at school," I stayed in at recess to write a letter. For some time there was nobody in the room but Mr. McArle and myself. Then he went out, and soon Joe Pressley came in. He walked straight to my place and sat down beside me. Then he took hold of my hair and began twisting my head from side to side in such a manner as to prevent my writing.

"Oh, Joe, please do behave! I want to finish my letter!" I cried petulantly.

The boy laughed derisively, and kept on twisting my head, while he asked:

"Who's your letter to?"

"It doesn't concern you a bit, who I am writing to; but if you'll leave off pulling my hair, I'll tell you."

Joe released his hold, and I continued:

"I am writing to a cousin up in Harlem. Now, are you satisfied?"

"No, I'm not," replied my tormentor, "I want to know if you expect her to treat your letter like you did the one I wrote you when I was a little shaver?"

That was the beginning of it. Then and there, Joe and I made up formally. He didn't kiss me, but it wasn't because he didn't try, nor because I wasn't willing, but because I was ashamed to let him.

We "stayed made up" all that winter and a part of the following summer, although we came very near having a rupture within two weeks of the peace negotiations. This danger was brought about by our having a spelling-school. If there is anybody living, except myself, who has ever attended one of these old-fashioned "spellings," he will remember that there were just three things on the program, namely: Spelling, Recess, More Spelling.

It was a bright moonlight night, and when the recess came, the young people went out in the yard and played "tag." Fun? Yes, indeed! no time for anything but fun. How we ran! and how our cheeks burned from the effects of exercise and the frosty air!

On the way to the house, Joe touched my arm and said:

"Wait, I want to speak to you." But the crowd carried me onward, and he failed "to speak."

In company with a couple of other girls, I paused to get a drink from the bucket that stood just inside the door. After drinking a little and spilling more of the water, we marched in single file round the stove and on to our places. That is, the others

marched without hindrance, but I was brought to a halt as I passed the stove, by the interposition of a short, fat, red-headed boy, who said :

“Ouisse, can’t I see you home to-night?”

Now, if he had asked me to take a trip to the moon, I wouldn’t have been one whit more at a loss what to say. So I didn’t say anything, and somebody behind me gave us both a shove. Finding myself free from the kidnapper, I went forward and took my place in the class.

Tom Dudley, the red-headed boy, managed to hold his position at the stove until Mr. McArle had made the second call for the spellers to take their places. With his hands behind him, and making as long strides as his short legs would permit, he walked slowly up the aisle and down in front of the class past where I sat. I had looked at him as he stood there by the stove from the very minute I took my seat. This was not because of his beauty, for he had freckles as well as red hair; but from an impression that I hadn’t treated him right, and an inability to tell what I ought to do. When he approached me, he slackened his pace and looked me steadily in the eyes. Then, like the young fool that I was, I nodded my head. A moment after I thought of Joe, and was sorry I had done it. That was one of the times when I failed to follow Old Dan’s advice to fit myself for the pursuit of happiness.

The session came to an end, and Tom came to my side and stayed there till we reached my home. It was a very uncomfortable trip. I was so much taller than he, that it made my arm tired before we came to a place where the wagons had left a small bank between the paths made by the wheels. Then Tom walked up on that ridge, and that improved matters somewhat.

My companion tried to talk, but my teeth chattered so that I couldn't answer him very coherently. To make bad matters worse, some of the boys came walking rapidly up behind us. Joe Pressley was among them; and in passing us, he crowded Tom so hard that he slipped from the ridge into the path in front of me, and I almost fell over him.

Tom swore some and then tried to apologize; Joe and his friends went on, laughing heartily; and I made a solemn vow never to marry a little man.

After some very strong accusations on Joe's part, and some very humble explanations on mine, the peace was patched up. It lasted until the next June, when Joe took it into his head that it was time for us to get married. Although I was not quite prepared for such a proposal as that was, I had been learning rapidly; and I told him that we must not think of such a thing, because neither his parents nor mine would consent to it.

"Bah! Do you suppose I don't know that?" re-

turned Joe, "but I've got it all planned. We'll run off to Steubenville and get married before we tell 'em about it. When it can't be helped, my old daddy'll let us live in the red cottage and give me a partnership in the contracts."

Mr. Pressley's conduct under the supposed circumstances was never determined. I made Joe wait a week for an answer; and, in the meantime, I went to Old Dan, and, putting a hypothetical case before him, asked him what a girl ought to do under such circumstances.

Joe called me "a heartless flirt," and vowed vengeance on "the old man or woman who had influenced my decision, as he knew someone must have done;" but Dan died a natural death, notwithstanding.



## XII.

### TRANSITION.

How rapidly time flies when a girl is hovering around her twentieth year! When she is eighteen, she feels as if the two intervening years will prove an age. Then they are gone, and she has an impression that she has had only a small sized dream in the meantime. She forgets how old and wise she expected to be when she should have counted twenty years, and feels as young and, usually, acts as childish as she did five years before. Again she proceeds to place age and wisdom ahead of her; and, with the contempt for time which increases as the years pass over our heads, she fixes the date as much as five years ahead.

The maiden of twenty thinks of what may happen in a score of years, and sighs at the thought that she will then be too old to have any interest in such things, if, indeed, she should be living; but at forty, or fifty, she makes an immense pompadour of her white hairs, takes anti-fat, uses face-massage, and wonders with a little shrug "if her charms will have left her when she gets to be old like Granny Wiggins, who died yesterday." Poor old Granny! She was eighty, and wasn't ready to die, either.

I am not casting reflections. It is perfectly right

and proper not to feel old. The absurdity is in expecting ever to do so. For generations, mankind have been preparing for age, and preparing for death but it is time this should be stopped. We may not live to be old, and we may not feel the lack of preparation when we are dead; but we are sure to miss the gifts of to-day if we are not ready to receive them; just as I missed the pleasure of Joe Pressley's kiss by saving it for the husband I never got.

Let no critic say I am advocating promiscuous kissing among boys and girls in their teens. That would be false, and I should not hesitate to say so. It is the select article to which I have reference. A single kiss on that afternoon in the old schoolhouse, would possibly have led to many repetitions of the performance by the same actors; but there are many reasons for believing that it would have seemed a sacred thing, and have lessened the probability of such a rehearsal by either party without his particular "star."

In defiance of the regulation doctrine that to-day is valuable only as a forerunner of to-morrow, I managed to get an average amount of enjoyment out of those days of frizzed bangs, long overskirts, parties, and propriety lectures. I hadn't much plan for the future, although I was always going to do something, or be something, or have something, in

that golden day. I pieced quilts because I expected to go into a house of my own "In the sweet by and by;" and coaxed mother to mend the stockings that I was to wear on the following day. I treasured glass dishes which had been given to me "for future use," and shed tears because I couldn't afford a steel copy of Bonheur's "Horse Fair." I cooked and baked, washed and ironed; and, although the poverty of my existing condition galled me, I bore it cheerfully because I thought that father was on the highway to fortune.

If it could have been impressed upon my mind that my proper course was to go to work for myself on the first opportunity that offered, and expend upon it the brain and nerve force with which I was planning for the coming "good time," I think I should certainly have been a millionaire. It wasn't for lack of steam that I failed to make the best of my time, but for lack of a track and a lever. In those days, the doctrine of equal industrial opportunities for the sexes had not gained a footing in our ward of the American municipality; so I had no thought but to hold on to the sleeve of my father, or some other man.

I sometimes did small jobs of sewing or other like work for the neighbors, but they were keenly alive to the fact that I "hadn't learned the trade," and governed their pay and criticisms accordingly.

Once I made a coat for one of Mrs. Brook's boys. It had been cut by a tailor, and yet the sleeves did not "set" in a satisfactory manner. The lady declared that I had them in upside down. I did not think it possible, but she insisted that I change them and put the long side of the armhole to the hollow side of the sleeve. I did it, and then we called Jimmy to try it on.

"That won't do," was the boy's verdict. "I can't stand it to hold my hands up over my head all the time."

On another occasion I made a "best dress" for a farmer's wife. It was a grey merino, had three small ruffles on the skirt, with similar trimming on the overskirt and basque. I cut and fit it myself. And it did fit. Possibly a Worth would not have considered the finish quite up to his standard, but then, I had no intention of charging Worth prices.

Mrs. Farmer expressed herself as being well pleased with the job, until it came to the settlement. In reply to her request for the charge, I told her that it would be two dollars.

"My stars!" cried the woman, in great consternation, "you don't expect me to pay any such price as that, do you?"

"Certainly I do," I returned, "if I hadn't expected you to pay it I wouldn't have asked it."

"Well, you'll be badly disappointed," declared my

irate customer. "The work isn't worth a penny more than a dollar; but I'll give you one and a quarter, if that'll satisfy you."

I very promptly told her that "it wouldn't satisfy me, and that I would take the two dollars and nothing less."

"Well," she said, with an air which indicated that a finality was coming, "you'll have to pick your goose before you can sleep on the feathers; and if you ever pick that two dollars of me, it'll be after you've served your time with a regular dressmaker, and can do two-dollar work."

"But if I were a professional it would cost you twice that sum," I asserted with as much spirit as the woman had displayed.

I knew her, and knew that if she ever got the advantage of me she would not fail to keep it. With suppressed anger and unnecessary deliberation, I put the underskirt and basque into a neat package and handed it to her.

"Going to do the overskirt up separately?" she asked.

"I'm going to keep the overskirt until I get the pay for my work," I replied resolutely.

"But I can't wear the dress without it. The skirt is all shammed at the top."

"I can't help that," I replied, "you can have the

rest of the dress as soon as you get the two dollars for me."

She left the money and took all the dress; but a multiplication of such experiences rendered me careless about taking work from the neighbors, and I confined my efforts to my home and friends from whom I expected no remuneration, other than an exchange of commodities.

Ah! those exchanges of commodities! I didn't always get the worst of it there. I have read more borrowed books than I have ever owned, or ever expect to own. That is the one redeeming feature of my conduct during that period of my life. I never failed to read every book whose contents came within the scope of my understanding, if I could buy, beg, or borrow it.

There were no extensive libraries in Hammondsville, but several of the inhabitants owned a few books, and seldom refused to loan them. I was not troubled with diffidence about asking for what I wanted, and, consequently had access to nearly all the books I saw. It may be that some of my friends learned my ways, and hid their books at my approach. Indeed I sometimes wondered that a few of them possessed such a limited supply; and it may be that the supply was simply stowed away out of my sight. I went so far as to borrow the initial volume of a course in German, and made myself

master of its contents. I studied the patent medicine advertisements. It is almost incredible, the amount of shoveling I did to get a few grains of knowledge. But it was dig, or do without. And I dug.

### XIII.

#### THE TANGLE.

There are few rules to which I have proved the exception. I kept a diary. That is, I kept one for a time, and not a very long time; but, I presume, quite as long as the average. I began the work because I had a sort of feeling that I had passed from one phase of existence to another. I feared that, for the future, the world would not be altogether the same to me that it had been before; and I knew that I should never again be what I had been to the world. There was no doubt about the latter. The world never looks upon an Old Maid as it does upon other females. It views her through a different lens. It measures her by a special rule. It judges her by a different code. In fact, it sizes her up much as the small boy does the elephant at the circus. He is certain that it isn't a beautiful animal; he knows that it takes "an awful sight" of room; he is sure that, if he had been God, he would have made elephants better looking; he can't see that it is of any earthly account, and yet, a circus wouldn't be a circus without an elephant.

As the shows can't get along without elephants, so the world can't get along without Old Maids. I speak of this last as an impossibility, because in-



fanticide had gone out of fashion, and there could be no other way out of the difficulty except to inaugurate a reign of polygamy, or perpetrate Old-Maid-icide upon women who had reached the age of spinsterhood without being married.

It is a great pity that there are more females than males born into the world, for it doesn't seem quite fair to hold a woman responsible for not getting married when there was no man made for her benefit. It would be bad enough to make culprits of the women who refused the chains of matrimony, if each refusal doomed a man to live wifeless. But such is not the case. There are plenty of women to give every man a "helpmeet" and still leave a surplus in the treasury of womankind.

It does seem to me that men should look upon this reserve fund with a favorable eye; because death is swift and sure, and no one man of them can be certain to-day that he will have a companion to-morrow. But men, as a class, take very little thought for the future of anything but the markets. They will pass a "Maiden Lady" with no more than a careless nod, and almost break their necks to learn what the supply of wheat is likely to be on the first of the following month, when it is just as possible for that date to find them without a wife as to find the world without bread. I suppose, however, that

there isn't any possibility of selling short on wives and buying at a lower figure to fill the contract.

But I am wasting time on these speculations, when it was my purpose to give some facts from that diary of mine. I will insert a part of the items entire, thus saving the time of rewriting them. The trouble of writing is a serious obstacle to fame as an author. If it had not been for this fact, I have no doubt that I should have been an author of renown many years ago.

If this were the story of a life other than my own, I should consider it incumbent upon me to withhold some of the contents of those pages that were written for no eye but that of the person whose hand penned the lines; but, as the case stands, I shall reserve nothing which is necessary to the full understanding of my conduct and character.

In these extracts I shall give the date in full, because, either I shall be dead before this book finds a publisher, or the sale of it will make me a fortune. In either case, it will be of no consequence who knows how old I am.

It will be noticed that I have no doubt of the manner in which the Public will receive my offering; but the mood in which a manuscript will find the Publishing Fraternity is an unknown quantity with insufficient data on which to base an equation.

"March 20th, 1880. This, my 25th birthday, and

I begin this diary in commemoration of the event. I did not have any birthday party. The time for such things is past for me. Not that I am in any way ashamed of my age, but an occasion of that kind would be likely to cause unpleasant comment, which it is wholly superfluous for me to provoke. Besides, if I should call in my friends to rejoice with me when I stepped one round higher upon the ladder of life, every married woman in the place would declare that I was at least five years older than the reality.

"I suppose that I am now a confirmed Old Maid. No, I will not put it confirmed, because there are many chances that I may marry some time. Still, at present, I don't feel as if I should ever do so. I have always thought it very foolish for a woman to vow that she would never be the wife of any man, but there is no reason why she should not think that she has no such desire.

"I would like to record a statement of the facts as to whether I am an Old Maid from choice or necessity, but I find it hard to decide. If Douglass Wrenner had never crossed my path I should have married Charlie Nelson, or remained single from choice; and, if Charlie hadn't wanted me to marry him, I should have been an Old Maid from necessity.

"The thing is a good deal of a tangle to me. If I knew as much as I thought I did ten years ago,

I should be able to solve the riddle. But I don't. I know that Charlie is a good, honest, business-like fellow, with a handsome face and a manly figure. I know, too, that his love is all, and more, than I had any right to hope would fall to my lot. What could I, with my many imperfections, expect in the way of lovers? Charlie talks about my 'fine figure,' my 'pretty eyes,' and my 'wonderful hair;' but I think about my big nose, my mouth with its drooping corners, and my horrid brown face. Charlie tells me that 'he has always seen into my soft, loving heart, my wealth of sympathy,' and a lot of other nonsense; but while he is talking I can't think of anything but this 'ungovernable temper' and this 'head-strong disposition,' which have been held up to me as my shame and sin ever since I can remember.

"Other girls can get mad twice to my once—and for no cause in the world but pure pettishness—and then cry and say they're sorry, and nobody pays any attention to it. But I'm not sorry when I get mad. If there were anything about it to be sorry for, I wouldn't get mad. And so, I have an 'ungovernable temper!'

"And, too, if I were only a man, my 'head-strong disposition' would be no more than strength of purpose, determination, and other manly qualities. Bah!

"I half believe that Charlie is right, and I'm not a

bad sort of creature after all. Anyway, I believe he does love me and sometimes I fancy that I might have married him and been quite content and happy, if Professor Wrenner had never been to college with Mr. Nevin, or if Mr. Nevin hadn't bought the mines, or if I had never taken a fancy to read geology, or if some other thread of the tangle hadn't gone and pulled it all up into such a knot that it can never be unwound. It was all right for him to 'study the botanical and geological features of our hills,' but Mr. Nevin needn't have asked me to assist him with his researches. It was absolutely unfortunate that I ever began pounding around among the rocks.

"If anyone had hinted to me a year ago, that I should ever come to acknowledge, even to myself, that I loved a married man, I should have—shown my 'temper,' at least. But how could I help it? His society opened a new world for me. All those things of which I had but the vaguest knowledge were to him but a primer. He helped me to understand Spencer and Müller as readily as I had done the stories in my old Fifth Reader. He was stronger, mentally, than I was; and my weak, longing, struggling soul took hold of his more stable individuality, and refused to be torn away. I could not help it. No woman ever truly loves the man whom she doesn't have to look up to. She must

feel that he is wiser and stronger than she, or she cannot give him the whole of her woman-heart.

"Talk about winning a woman's love! Man can't *win* from woman her best love. He must *command* it. The man who cannot command the love of the woman of his choice must make up his mind to take second place in his household, or to fight it out with her for the rest of his life. She may love him much as she would a handsome boy some years her junior; but she will expect to dictate to him just as she would be able to do with the youth in question. The superior man commands a woman's love in spite of herself; and that is what Douglass Wrenner has done with me. He never meant to do it. I could see that it broke his heart as well as mine.

"When I saw the precipice on which I was standing, I felt that I ought to draw back; but how could I? I argued that, if I declined his society, he would guess my secret. So, day after day, I led him to the places I knew would interest him; evening after evening, I helped him to prepare and arrange his specimens. No matter who was present, they always seemed to consider it my duty to entertain him. I have been weak, I know; but it is only the weakness of womanhood. I cannot blame myself without censuring the circumstances that determined my sex and brought us together. I think of my conduct as folly, but it was not folly as that term

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is popularly understood. It was more a misfortune, or a mischance of Fate, than mere Folly.

"But it is all over now. Douglass is gone; and I have told Charlie Nelson that 'I think it best that he and I should not consider the subject of marriage,' and that 'I shall be perfectly content to be an Old Maid.'

"I was really distressed about Charlie when he said: 'Ouisse, I thought you understood that I was just waiting until I could give you a decent home, before I asked you to marry me. How could you be so blind?'

"I told him that 'I wasn't blind. I knew how he had felt about it, and had thought it possible that I should be quite willing to go to the home he would make for me.'

"Then he wanted to know why I had changed my mind; and I replied that 'it was because I saw plainly I did not love him as he deserved to be loved.'

"Charlie thought it had been his own fault, that he had been over-confident of success and had made too little effort to hold the place that he wanted in my affections.

"I was tempted to tell him the truth; but then I knew it could do no good, and might make bad matters worse. When he was about to leave me, he said:

“‘Well, Ouisse, you’re not the most beautiful woman in the world, but there was always something about you that gave things a different color, and made a fellow feel that he was farther removed from the brutes.’

“I have been careful to put down this speech because I never expect to have anybody pay me a better compliment. Poor Charlie! I do feel sorry for him; but I can’t pity him as I might if my own heart were not breaking.”

The foregoing extract may need a little explanation. As far as it goes, it tells the facts in the case far better than I could do it now. But it does not make it plain that I was not alone in what some will denominate “my guilt.”

One evening after Professor Wrenner had been at Hammondsville for nearly six weeks, a number of us climbed to the bluff above the “coal-banks.” There were Mr. McArle, now an old man; two of his daughters, my sister, Charlie Nelson, a couple of young men, who sold goods for the village merchant; Mr. Nevin, Professor Wrenner, and myself.

As we descended the hill on our way home, I stopped to show the old school teacher the spot in a cliff where I had found a certain bit of shale with the impression of a leaf in it. As might have been expected, Douglass Wrenner came to the place and



began digging the rock loose with the stick which he carried.

Mr. McArle soon followed the others; but the professor's cane, bringing down a fragment of shale, caused us to remain some time behind. At last, we tired of looking for impressions, and started down the hill.

If one has anything of an unusual nature on his mind it will come to him with redoubled force in the twilight; and the excitement of the search being ended, I found myself so oppressed with the weight of my thoughts that I heartily wished we had not fallen behind our companions.

We reached the last steep place above the valley. He called my attention to a point where, in the distance, the creek flowed round the hill; and we paused to enjoy the beauty of the view. Then he stepped down the first abrupt declivity, and turned to give me his assistance.

I put my hand out about half the distance to him, and then involuntarily drew it back. With the agility of a mountain lion, he sprang back to my side. Catching my head between his hands, he turned my face upward and looked intently into my eyes. I struggled bravely to control myself, but my heart beat wildly, and my labored breathing might have frightened those who were interested in my safety. I can see him yet. I shall never forget it.

It is so frightful to see every vestige of color leave the face of a strong, healthy man. He gave vent to a sort of cavernous sigh, and I knew that his heart was beating normally again.

Loosening his hold upon my temples, he slipped his arm round my waist, and stepping over the little cliff, lifted me down to his side. How masterful his will! How superb his strength! I was not a small woman, but I was a mere child in his hands. Holding me thus, he again searched my face. It was an awful moment. I knew all; he knew all; and each was aware of the other's knowledge. Again he gave utterance to that long-drawn sigh; and, drawing my arm through his own, he led me down the pathway into the valley below.

No word was spoken until we had crossed the railroad bridge at the foot of the path. Then he began speaking very low and softly of his duties at the college, then of his home, and at last, almost in a whisper, he made some allusion to his wife.

I never misunderstood a word of it. I knew that it was a sublime effort to fortify our joint wills in a resolve to accept our fate and make the best of our lives in spite of it.

At the door of my home, he said "Good-night" in a tone that meant good-by; and that "Good-by" was forever.

As I look back, it seems to me that during that

walk, he was exerting his great strength to save us both. The barbed hand of Fate hemmed us in on every side. Here was the love that we could not escape; there, the cast-iron marriage ceremony which nothing but death or disgrace could annul. During the entire walk, I was silent. He did not seem to expect me to talk. I was conscious of no will, no power, but as I gathered them from him; and, true to his kingly nature, true to the protective instinct of his manhood, he tenderly led me through the one great peril of both our lives.

## XIV.

### THE REST OF THE DIARY.

"March 21st. It is almost bedtime, and this is the first spare time I have found to-day. I find that, so far as the duties of life are concerned, being an Old Maid is very like being any other sort of a woman. One has to eat, drink, and work (if one is poor); and sleep, too. So I think I'll go to bed. Don't think I am going to care much for a diary after all."

This was the second entry in what I had intended should be a minute record of the doings of my life. In beginning the chronicle on the previous day, I had satisfied my longing for some ear into which to pour the thoughts that bore so heavily upon my mind.

Charlie Nelson had been away from the village during the preceding winter; and, on his arrival a week before, had come to me with his proposal of marriage. This circumstance had brought back the happenings of that memorable summer of seventy-nine; and what with my regret on Charlie's account, my pain at the laceration of the old wound in my heart, and the arrival of that notable birthday, the flood of feeling had been too great; and the diary was the consequence. Truly, it was a harmless out-

let for the surplus of sentimentalism, as many others have been fortunate enough to discover.

"March 30th. It is perfectly absurd that this should be the fifth entry in this book in eleven days. I am thinking of learning the millinery trade. Some time I shall have to depend entirely upon my own efforts for a living; and as there is nothing else accessible in this village, I believe I'll try that. Still, if I should prove myself capable of learning it, there would be no opening for employment without going to a city. Well, I'll see about it.

"Mother had sick headache to-day. Charlie Nelson went back to the city. He came over last night to say 'Good-by;' and then I went to bed and cried half the night. It makes my heart ache to see the hungry light in his eyes. I'm sure there isn't another man in town but would wonder why he cares. I wonder that, myself. Not that I think myself altogether without attractions; but then I'm not the sort of a woman many men would care about. I wonder if all Old Maids are that way and know it. I wonder, too, if it isn't the knowledge of it that keeps them single.

"Dear, honest, old Charlie! His offer of marriage has prevented my being an Old Maid from necessity; but I would gladly have foregone all the consolation that fact may be to me in the future, for

the sake of hearing his old cheery laugh when we parted last night.

"Well! if this don't beat anything! I had clear forgotten about Joe Pressley. But that was such a foolish affair that it don't count."

"May 27th. I put strings to my sweet peas to-day. It is surprising how very fast they do grow. They are six inches high. I shall make an item of the size of those I have at this date next year.

"I had a letter from Charlie Nelson to-day. It came as a wonderful surprise, because there was an understanding between us that he was not to write to me any more. He wrote to tell me that he had met Professor Wrenner at his hotel. It appears that, in talking over affairs at Hammondsville, he had told the professor of his proposal to me. He says: 'Wrenner was very sorry, and looked as bad as if it had been himself. He told me to be patient; and, possibly, some time you would change your mind. He wrung my hand at parting, and said that he would be glad if it were possible for him to do me a favor. So, Ouise, dear old girl, if you think there is any chance for me, just say so, and I'll write you an occasional letter and come home at Christmas to talk it over.'

"Oh, Charlie! Charlie! if you could only know! Dear, old friend, I thank you a thousand times for

your wonderful devotion. I wish there was something I could do to make amends. I pity you—oh, so much! and ‘Pity is akin to love;’ but not the love I must give to the man I marry.

“I have written to him that ‘he will always have a warm place in my friendship, but it is useless to build any hopes upon a change in my feelings with regard to him.’ That was the best I could think of. The truth is that if I ever marry anybody, it must be a man that I had never seen when I met Douglass Wrenner.”

There had been several entries between this and the one given last, but they contained nothing of sufficient importance to be recorded even in a confession.

About this time I began to wonder if my life was to be one great blunder, or rather, a series of small blunders. If such should, indeed, prove to be the case, I wondered who was to blame. I had always meant to do the correct thing, as nearly as my knowledge would permit. I hadn’t asked to come into the world. I was not responsible for my endowments, such as they were; and my environment had been forced upon me. So, when I summed it up in my mind, I felt that, if there really was a responsible party in the case, I was not that individual.

“Ouisse,” I said to myself, “you are just going to

go along in this world as best you can; and if things persist in tangling themselves up in this fashion, the knot will become so tight after awhile that it will stop your further progress; and then you'll be out of it."

"July 23d. I'm just as tired as a dog, to-night. Have been helping Nancy can cherries. I ought to have gone to Wellsville and bought that summer dress if I am to have any good of it; but Nancy is always heels over head in work, and mother thought I ought to go and help her with the cherries.

"I felt a little like rebelling. It wasn't my fault that she married a man who expects her to do as much work as two women should. It isn't my fault that she has three children under five years of age. She says 'The Lord sent the little dears, and she'll not complain.' Well, I wish she and the Lord would take care of them, and not expect me to be everlastingly helping her with her work 'because she has so many children.' Nancy's a poke, anyway. I can do as much work in one day as she can in two. Of course, I don't take much time in stuffing rags into the spouts of the coffee-pot and tea-kettle, or in straining fresh water from the well lest there should be lint from the rope in it; but, if I had to depend upon my relations to help me out in every emergency, I'd feel it incumbent upon me to drink a little lint.

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"There's another twist in the tangle. Nancy is a born Old Maid, according to the popular conception of the character; and yet she went and got married about the time she was twenty-one. To my taste, she was not very particular about the kind of man she got; but if she's satisfied, I suppose it is all right. At any rate, satisfied or not, the bargain has to stand; and there is nothing left for her to do, but to take care of the children and keep on trying to catch up with her work.

"The children! bless the sweet little creatures! If it were not for them, I think that, sometimes, I'd let Nancy fight her own battles. But they love me almost as well as they do their mother, and are just as cute as so many little monkeys. I have to laugh yet, at the recollection of what Minnie said to-day. I gave her a cake, and when I asked her 'what she was going to say now,' she pursed up her tiny mouth and said, 'Two.'

"She got the other cake in spite of Nancy's remonstrances. If people will teach children to be little pigs over sweetmeats, they mustn't expect me to inaugurate a health régime for them. Minnie wouldn't eat a bit of anything sweet when she was a baby, but Simon never slept good until he taught her to eat candy. Somehow, I have a sort of pity for children. Parents absolutely refuse to let them be natural; and then, when the little ones carry their

acquired habits to the extreme, they 'wonder how it comes that Johnny or Jennie doesn't have any self-control.'

"Well, it's a mystery what I am writing all this for. Sort of thin material for an Old Maid's diary. But I've just felt in the mood for writing, and I fancy that's about all the good there is in a diary at best."

"September 19th. Mother is still better to-day. This is the 23d day, and Dr. Doyle says that all danger is over. What a terrible time it has been here for the last three weeks. I shall have a perfect horror of fever for the rest of my life. It might not have been so bad if it had been anybody but mother. Mothers are mothers, and we love them dearly in spite of their faults. Perhaps it will be said that we should not think they have faults. We don't think it, but we can't help knowing it. They are only human, and it would be the sheerest nonsense to expect them to be perfect. If they were perfect, I doubt if we should love them half so well. Still, they should be the wisest and best of mankind, they who assume the responsibility of forcing sentient beings into a world in which suffering is as prevalent as joy. In very truth, I believe there ought to be a training school for parents, and that no man nor woman should be allowed to enter wedlock who could not make an eighty grade at the final exami-

nation. This would have greater effect in the salvation of the race than any other school in existence.

"But my own dear mother! she who married in her teens, brought us into the world, and battered us along through it as best she could with the meager knowledge she possessed until we are now grown women; she who would have been the wisest of her sex if she could only have been instructed in the principles of human happiness; what awful agony have I suffered during her sickness! And yet, too, how very selfish the sorrow which arose from a feeling that I could not live in a world where she was not."

For three weeks before this entry, my mother had been lying ill with a violent attack of typhoid fever. Disease is a terrible thing at best, but when it comes to the mother, it adds to the usual misery the total disarrangement of the home. It forces husband and children into positions which never fall to their lot at any other time.

In defiance of the awful seriousness of the situation, it was absolutely laughable to see father attempt to administer medicine. I did laugh till the tears came when I caught him stirring a powder with his toothpick. Nancy said that "she thought I'd have more respect for mother than to laugh at such a time." Still, what did I care for Nancy's snubbing, except sometimes? But when father flung

the medicine spoon under the grate because he wanted it out of his hand that he might pick up a cup of water, his conduct got the better of her sobriety. She didn't laugh. Nancy can't laugh without a deal of trouble; but she did cry out:

"Lord save the spoon!"

Those weeks of trouble showed me to myself in a new light. I had always supposed that I couldn't take care of sick people. My elder sister had a wealth of confidence in her own ability to do unusual things, such as nursing, and an absolute unbelief in mine. Hence, when mother was not on hand in cases of illness at home or among the neighbors, Nancy always represented our family until her home cares became too arduous to admit it. Then, too, Dodie was a born housekeeper, and had a knack of knowing just what to do and when and how to do it. Thus it had happened that there had never been much necessity for my devoting myself to an invalid, nor much chance to do so even had I been so disposed.

But during mother's sickness, Nancy's home duties would not permit her to be away for any great length of time, and Dodie, who had herself been indisposed when mother fell ill, was ordered to stay away from the disease. Hence, for the first time in my life, I found a great big open space for me in a sick-room. I didn't stop to think whether I

could fill it or not. I didn't have time to think. I just took up my part in the battle for my mother's life and fought it with the same tireless energy which characterized all my undertakings.

I have somewhere seen a statement something like this: "Corner a coward, and he'll fight harder than a brave man." That is one of my peculiarities. Put me in a corner where I must work my way out, or stay there, and I'll bend every energy to the task; but I'll not get into the corner if I can help it. I'm bad enough, but that other member of Our Sisterhood who will not work when she needs to is worse still.

In that gloomy autumn my readiness to hear and to obey, to follow what I believed to be the best guide on any subject, served me faithfully and well; and when mother was able to leave her bed, I had the pleasure of hearing Nancy corroborate mother's statement when she said that "it was very surprising, but Ouisse really was a first-class nurse."

Oh, that praise which is wrung out of people in defiance of their inclinations! How I love it! And that little compliment did me more good than anything that happened, except mother's recovery.

"October 15th. Finished my new polonaise to-day. Mother went up to visit Nancy. I think that I shall be justified in going to Wellsville to-morrow. I shall not take this diary with me, but shall write

everything down when I come back. Old Dan came in this morning, and spoke of my going with as much interest as if I were about to sail for England. He charged me not to lose my heart to any of those town gentlemen. I believe Dan thinks I'll marry him when I find I can't get anybody else. Well, I'd just as soon have him as some younger men I could indicate. He has the material of a gentleman in him if circumstances have warped it a little out of shape. He is just like a bit of molten gold that had been spilled into a basket of burrs. It will not be a thing of beauty, but it will be gold after all.

"Just think of being tied for life to that lump of brass in boots that Anna Nelson calls 'My husband.' Old Dan is a king beside him. Strange! as many nice men as there are in the world, that Anna should have married such a piece of gaudy trumpery as that. And I verily believe she makes a show of thinking him to be a somebody, just to hide the fact that she knows him to be a veritable nothing.

"What's the use of writing such lots of stuff in a diary? For the future I am going to confine myself to a plain record of occurrences."

That was the last entry made in that diary. When I came back from town, I found that Dodie, in one of her "straightening up" moods, had gone through the small drawer in which I kept the book; and, though

I knew that she would never waste time on any of my scribbling, I shuddered at the thought that there was a bare possibility of somebody finding it, who might not pass it over unnoticed. I wrapped the thing up and stuffed it into an old shoe. Then I put it into the bottom of the small trunk which was my own private property.

Poor Anna Nelson! This reference to her reminds me of an evil thought which it is my duty to confess, now that it has been brought to my mind. No doubt it would have been quite as creditable to forget it; but I am not writing this for credit. Conscience before credit, all the time.

A small company was collected at the home of a neighbor, just a few days before the fever attacked my mother; and Anna and her husband, happening to be on a visit to her parents, were of the number. Possibly I was a little too critical, for Anna had said to me shortly after her arrival:

"It's a pity you haven't got a man, Ouisse; you must be every day of twenty-five."

"Yes," I replied, "I'll be half-past twenty-five sometime next month. But then, Anna, if the Lord didn't make any man for me, I suppose I'll have to put up with the consequences."

My thoughts flew to that handsome brother of hers, but I knew she was ignorant of the affair, or she would never have made the remark.

"Well, it must be an awful thing to be an Old Maid," she said in a meant-to-be sympathetic tone; "but maybe somebody'll have you yet. I wouldn't give up if I were in your place."

"I don't suppose you would, but I'm not of a very hopeful disposition."

She looked quickly into my face, but I smiled treacherously back at her, and she decided the little sting had not been intended.

But it had been intended.

Because of this circumstance, I have no doubt that I was on the lookout for flaws. Still, if such had not been the case, I don't think I could have failed to notice the conduct of "My husband" when he found an opportunity to expand himself.

He was a great, big, pumpkin-faced fellow, the front profile of whose figure gave one the idea that it had been moulded on the inside of a barrel-stave. He had round, expressionless eyes, and spoke as if he had a file of hot chestnuts on each side of his tongue.

"The first time I ever visited Hammondsville," he declared pompously, "was the spring I entered college."

He had been to Mount Union for a term of three months, and called that "entering college."

"And that was a lucky visit for you," a young man said, with a smile and a bow to Anna.



"Think so?" questioned the fellow. Then, after taking a little time to think the matter over, he added: "It was sort o' surprising that a Mount Union man should find a wife in Hammondsville."

The entire party stiffened and stared. Anna's face colored violently, and the great booby, seeing that he had made a blunder, blurted out:

"Yes, it was lucky. Very lucky! Anna's an awful good washer."

I did pity Anna; but in spite of my sympathy, I sent her a glance which meant:

"No doubt I could get to be somebody's washer-woman if I wanted to."

I wish now that I had gone to her rescue, as I might very well have done if I had not been spiteful.

I didn't know, then, that Anna's sympathy was to be but one of several hundred like proffers of which I should be made the recipient before I came to write this Confession.

## XV.

### FEMININE JEALOUSY.

Mr. Nevin was a generous, whole-souled gentleman, and very popular with the people of the village. Hence, the news that he was about to bring his family to live at Hammondsville was hailed with great delight. For six years he had owned the large coal-field on the east side of the creek, and had spent most of his time at the village, attending to his interests, while his wife had remained with her parents in the city of her birth.

"I have never felt as if I had a home," he said, "and now I am going to have Mollie and the children down here."

So "Mollie and the children" came, and were soon on as friendly terms with the old residents as Mr. Nevin, himself. I had the good fortune to find myself on intimate terms with the lady in less than a fortnight after her arrival. When she came, I called immediately, and in the course of the visit, said that I feared she would find the society of our place very different from that to which she had been accustomed; but, if she were willing to take us Yellow Creek people for what we were worth, I, for one, would be glad to do all in my power to make her stay among us as pleasant as possible.

She was a practical, sensible sort of woman, and appeared to be well pleased with my assurance; but my remark was overheard and repeated, and made me the butt of considerable criticism among the female population of the place.

"Ouisse is trying to curry favor," said one.

"Catch me acting as if I thought her any better than me," sneered another.

"Ouisse always carried her head too high," declared a third.

"I'll see to it that Mrs. Nevin knows how old she is," asserted Tom Dudley's wife. She was an immensely fat woman, about five and a half feet in height, whom Tom, reckless of the disparity in size and of the fact that she was five years his senior, had taken for better or worse about the time he was twenty-one.

When my offense was repeated to Nancy, she sighed and said:

"Oh, dear! Ouisse always had a headlong way of rushing into things; and, of course, she'll break her neck some day. But it's no fault of mine."

There may have been some slight discrepancies between this statement and the absolute truth, but it was no lie, because Nancy believed every word of it. And there was no discrepancy, even, about the closing declaration. Whatever happened to me

would not be caused by her failure to do her duty as a private lecturer.

I said to myself that these women were fools, and the worst kind of fools; but they were most too numerous for me to treat their clatter with the contempt I felt, so I tried to explain that, different as our surroundings were, it would be foolish to suppose that our ways would not be very different from Mrs. Nevin's. But, if she was the lady I took her to be, I had no doubt that she would consider the matter in a sensible light and meet us half way all the time.

There were a few who took my view of the situation; and, for some months, the storm hung calmly in the distance. The friendship between the newcomer and myself was cemented during the second week after her coming, when one of the children was sick for a couple of days. A nurse was unobtainable; and Mrs. Nevin, having always depended upon her mother in such cases, was much worried and at a loss what to do. In this emergency, her husband came and humbly begged me to go and stay with her for a few days.

As the summer weather grew fine, the monotony of her surroundings became oppressive; and Mrs. Nevin began to look about her for some simple means of amusement and variety. I told her of a wonderful service thicket up on Pine Ridge, and

she persuaded her husband to let us have old black Kate hitched to the pack-cart and drive out to get some of the fruit. The conveyance was so small that we could take no one but her two children (who sat behind the seat on the floor of the cart) if we had so desired. As a matter of fact, we had no thought of other company.

We found plenty of fruit, and Mrs. Nevin developed a surprising talent for climbing small trees. We gathered flowers, climbed fences, ran races with the children, worked ourselves into a perspiration that made us feel as if our hands were dirty, and then decided to go home.

I had taken the bridle off Kate "to let her eat grass," and when it came to putting it back, I found that I had fulfilled Nancy's prediction, and broken my neck for certain. It wouldn't go on any way. The little ones had been using it "to play horse," but I don't know that that made the trouble. I had never put a bridle on a horse before—and I didn't do it that time. The thing was a perfect riddle, and we gave it up, put the children and bridle into the cart, and took turns at leading the horse by the fore-top. At the end of a mile, we met a man who knew how to manage a horse's toilet, after which we went on home in good style.

The success of that trip made us eager for another, and we decided on a fishing excursion. We

wanted some of the neighbors to go with us, but no two could agree upon a day, and we went with only Dodie added to our former party.

This was too much. The cloud which had been slowly looming up in the social horizon, now burst with a dreadful fury. Thunder and lightning issued from a veritable army of female throats; and cold water fell in such torrents as to make me feel that it might be well for me to follow Noah's example, and build an ark. Very few said anything against Mrs. Nevin, although many began to be shy of her. I was the principal offender.

"She's parading around with a rich man's wife when she ought to be at home knitting," Mrs. Brice declared.

Of course, in those days, an Old Maid must knit. I never did much of it, and I'm glad I didn't. I'm glad, too, that the great hosiery factories will make it unprofitable for the Old Maids of future generations to practice the art, and thus exhibit this badge of their infirmity.

"Ouisse is getting entirely too stuck up," asserted Mrs. Dudley.

"Thinks she can't associate with common folks," hinted Alice McArle.

"Well!" returned Mrs. Dudley, with her lips drawn tightly over her teeth, "it seems to me that Mrs. Nevin ought to know that Old Maids are dan-

gerous characters. I wouldn't want her honeying around Tom."

"Is she getting too friendly with Mr. Nevin?" asked Miss McArle.

"Wouldn't be a bit surprised," declared my would-be prosecutor, "she's at their house so much and he can't be away all the time."

Horrible thought! A married man and a single woman can't be allowed in each other's company for fear they will fall in love; and that, too, when the woman is an Old Maid with a big nose.

Then I remembered! When should I ever forget! What would they say if they knew the truth? But I felt no guilt in my soul. Much as I loved Mrs. Nevin, if it had been her husband instead of Professor Wrenner, I could not have felt that I had committed any sin.

Kind, motherly Mrs. Nelson, with the best possible intentions, repeated to me the conversation between Mrs. Dudley and Miss McArle; and after thinking it over on the foregoing lines for a day or two, I was able to meet Keziah Dudley on the street. I found the atmosphere pretty chilly, but my own temperature was such that I did not mind it much. Mrs. Dudley showed no inclination to take the atmosphere away; but stopped to talk, as I had wanted her to do.

She fairly bristled with questions about our fam-

ily affairs, and peered into my face as if she expected to find something behind the answers.

"Oh, we're getting along famously at home," I cried airily, "and I'm thinking about taking a trip."

"Taking a trip! and where might you be going?"

"Just up to Wellsville. Mrs. Nevin and I are talking of going up there one day next week."

"Humph-h-h!" she ejaculated.

"Couldn't you go, too?" I asked in my very brightest tone, refusing to see the stiffness of her manner.

"Oh, no! I couldn't think of going," she answered with a sneer in her voice.

"Yes, you can. I'm sure of it. You don't need to take your husband along."

Now it was my turn to sneer. The woman looked a shrewd interrogation point into my face, and I added:

"You see, I've heard about your fears. But you don't need to give yourself any uneasiness. The affections of some men are too cheap to be worth having."

It was absurd and ill-bred for me to mention it, but I did it, and am under the necessity of confessing all such weaknesses.

It did me a whole harvest of good to tell her that. Although I was but three years past the last hope, I had found ample cause to feel a resentment against



those wives who fall back on one's spinsterhood when they feel that we have the best of them. Nor did I have any love for those who affected to speak sympathetically. I felt no need of their sympathy, and undesired pity is always galling. I did not mind raillery. Indeed, I had a sort of liking for that. It gave me a nice opportunity to talk back. And who ever saw an Old Maid who didn't enjoy talking back?

## XVI.

### A WIDOWER AND HIS "GREAT BIG GIRL."

Some few things do happen to break the monotony of rural life, but not many. This is not altogether the fault of circumstances. It is partly due to the ruralists themselves. They have an idea that, in cities, things just happen of themselves, and everybody has a good time without any effort. They are disposed to forget the host of people who are employed to make ready for a fashionable party. Possibly few of them have any conception of the facts in the case. They think it would be fine to attend museums and theaters, but fail to represent to themselves the time and effort which somebody must expend before these things are open to the public.

Every town and village should have an Old Dan to preach "Make the best of conditions." Still, if the inhabitants treated their teachings with as much contempt as we did those of Daniel Laughlin, the old men would find their efforts an almost profitless expenditure of time and energy. The millenium will surely arrive shortly after people have learned to avail themselves of good advice.

There was a ripple in our social world when somebody died. Everybody attended the funeral in

his best clothes, stood around and gossiped in a hoarse whisper while the undertaker earned his fees, and then went home and discussed the behavior of "the mourners." Nobody troubled themselves about the births. That is one of society's peculiar traits. It pays so much attention to the close of a life and so little to its opening. I may not be in a position to judge this question impartially, but I am strongly impressed with the idea that, if life is a blessing, there should be more importance attached to the arrivals in this world. At any rate, when the child is born *it is born*, and it is too late to help the matter. If there is happiness to be gotten out of life, the place to commence operations is at the front end; and, if Society or the parents are going to do anything toward the happiness of that child, at birth is the time to begin.

The second summer of Mrs. Nevin's stay at Hammondsville was unusually healthful; so we were short on funerals, and everybody was grumbling about the dullness of the place. Whether that was the inspiration of the idea or not, I am unable to say; but I do know that something prompted that lady to plan a general party. We had had a habit which, like hay-fever, cropped out about once a year, of having small gatherings of the young people, or the children; but the idea of making an entertainment for both these classes and the parents,

too, had never entered any head; or, if it had, it had been speedily choked down as quite impractical.

Imagine the surprise created when Mrs. Nevin announced her intention of giving a great garden party to which all these classes were to be invited. She even went so far as to include myself, who could not be considered as either a child, youth, or parent.

I assisted the lady with her preparations, and enjoyed the prospect immensely. I thought the event would put the last smoothing touch to the feathers which her friendship for me had so badly ruffled. I laughed as I wondered if Keziah Dudley would take the risk of letting Tom come. Moreover, I must confess to a sneaking inclination to flirt with him just a little.

Yes, "flirt!" I know of no other name for it; and no one need think that, because I knew my limitations as to good looks, amiability, and other like qualities, I didn't know I could engage the attention of a man of average calibre. Such creatures can be interested where they can't love.

I knew that a request for his views of the prospect for a Republican victory at the coming election would insure me of Tom Dudley's society for the next two hours, if I desired it. That red-headed worthy read a weekly "Party organ" from the top of the title-page to the last of the sixteenth column,

and considered himself an oracle of political wisdom. I was well aware that a few judicious questions concerning his views on the tariff would give greater opportunity to arouse his wife's jealousy than a bushel of good looks.

I know men; and if I had been small enough to marry a man from policy I should have been what he was for the same reason; and, if I had married him for love, I should have been what he desired, because I couldn't help it. I don't mean that I shouldn't have had a mind of my own. The man I could love wouldn't want me to be a mere dish-washing, shirt-making, child-bearing nonentity. The man whom I could love would be one who wanted his wife to be just about what I am. I shouldn't mind his being sorry that "my mouth was all torn down at the corners," but the exercise of smiling up at him for a few years would go a long way toward straightening it up.

The party came off according to program, and I had such a genuinely good time that I forgot my intention to arouse Mrs. Dudley's jealousy. The hostess had made no attempt at splendor; but had contented herself with having things bright and comfortable, and dispensing with everything which savored of formality.

I do enjoy loving people; and I think, for that one evening, I loved every one of Mrs. Nevin's

guests, not excepting Keziah Dudley. The pleased, happy faces reflected themselves upon my mind until I was in the seventh heaven of social happiness. This ability of reflection impresses me with the idea that, had I been blessed with the requisite amount of beauty, I should have made a charming sweetheart for some man. I should have loved him, first, for my own happiness; then I should have reflected the happiness I saw in his face; and, lastly, I should have made it the business of my life to return all to him with interest.

I hope no man will feel cheated because his sweetheart, or wife, is not after this particular pattern. Some people have all they deserve, and more, too.

In mentioning my kindly feelings toward the guests of that evening, I do not except Mrs. Brown, nor Mrs. Brown's brother. Possibly, it was this general amiability on my part that put the mischief into her head. No doubt her mind was open to any suggestion which promised relief from the care of an extra man and his three children. When Atlantus Cory's wife had died, a year before, he had brought his baby and left it in the care of his sister; and, a month prior to the time of the party, he had come back with the two other children and taken up his abode with her.

Shortly after we were assembled at the Nevin home, Mrs. Brown came to me, leading a small,

weazened girl, whose size indicated that she was somewhere near five. I felt a thrill of pity for the little creature; for, undersized as she evidently was, she wore a dress of the "gored" or "princess" pattern, which was rather more undersized than herself. Her stiff, brushy, muddy-yellow hair was drawn back so tightly that the poor, helpless innocent couldn't shut her eyes. I suppose she couldn't shut her mouth, either. I know she never did while she was in the range of my vision.

"Here's Brother Lant's oldest girl, Ouise," said Mrs. Brown. "I wanted you to see her. She's getting to be a great big thing, and can do lots of work."

"That's nice," I replied. Knowing I was expected to say something to the child, I added: "How old are you, little one?"

The "little one's" mouth was still open, but she didn't say how old she was; and her anxious aunt answered in her stead:

"She doesn't talk much. None of Lant's children is a bit peart. But she was seven years old day before yesterday."

"Seven years old!" I cried in surprise. "You surely don't call her a big girl for that age, Mrs. Brown?"

"She's fair size, Ouise, and she's growing to beat anything. It is surprising how much work she can do."

As Mrs. Brown has five children of her own, I did not consider myself competent to argue the question of size with her; but I still had my doubts as to the truth of her statement. I understood that a good big girl would be of great account to a step-mother, and appreciated Mrs. Brown's diplomacy. While I was still pondering the question, the lady renewed the conversation.

"We didn't bring Lant's other children. We thought maybe they'd make too many. But I want you to see them sometime. There's only two more, and the baby is an awful pretty little fellow, I can tell you. Here comes Lant, now. He wants to meet you."

The brother came up and was appropriately introduced, and then the fun began. Mrs. Brown soon took the "great big thing" away, and left her brother to my tender mercies.

Some folks have an impression that an Old Maid has a taste of paradise when she gets a widower into her clutches. Such people should disabuse their minds. I speak authoritatively; and I say that these ladies consider a widower with a family of children, who is on the hunt for a woman willing to cook, bake, wash and sew for these children, and himself into the bargain, just for the honor of being his wife, as one of the worst bores in existence. It is not that they hate him, or the children, or the work;



but that they do dislike such an uncomfortable combination. Possibly their position on the subject is very reprehensible. Why shouldn't they be willing to make themselves useful in this way? But whoever was willing to do what he should for the public welfare?

If I had not been in an unusually good humor, I suppose I should have taken offense at Mr. Cory's persistent attentions which made me the subject of many smiles and remarks on the part of the guests. He was quite as well aware of these as I was, but he appeared to enjoy them immensely. My humble opinion is that he took them as a compliment to his cleverness and sagacity.

I didn't encourage him a bit. I'm sure I didn't. But both he and his sister managed to mistake me. When the company was breaking up, Mrs. Brown came to me, and, nodding in the direction of her brother, who was standing by the gate, holding his child by the hand, said :

"Lant holds on to Kezie pretty closely ; but don't mind, I'll take charge of her when you go to start."

As a matter of course, I couldn't keep in a good humor all the evening. I hadn't expected to do so ; and I thought this was a good time to bristle up.

"If I am to have any say in the case, Mrs. Brown," I said resolutely, "you can take charge of Lant, and I'll take the little girl."

On the way home I passed Nancy, who couldn't walk fast for taking care of her new silk dress. Pausing to ask her how she had enjoyed the evening, I was treated to a lecture on "The sinfulness of deceiving the afflicted."

"It's bad enough to trifle with the affections of a man who is not under a cloud of grief; but it's absolutely shameful to add an arrow to the heart of one who has lost a wife."

"Come down to earth, Nancy, and tell me in plain language just what you mean," I said, laughing at the absurdity of the picture she had unconsciously drawn.

"Why! the way you treated Atlantus Cory."

And Nancy readjusted the folds of the silk skirt that she was carrying up around her waist.

## XVII.

### CHARLIE'S WIFE.

The reference to Nancy's silk dress, made in the preceding chapter, reminds me that it might be well to explain that my saintly sister had met with an unusual bit of good luck during the preceding year. Her husband had fallen heir to a large slice out of an estate left by a great-aunt who had lived in Germany; and they had rented their farm and moved into the best obtainable house in the village.

This change had not released me entirely from the necessity of rendering occasional assistance to Nancy; but it eased up matters somewhat. I cannot imagine the size of a fortune which would have induced them to forego what they considered their duty in the way of giving me employment to keep me out of mischief.

"We could afford to pay you for your trouble, now, Ouse," Nancy said, "but I know you wouldn't take it. Besides, you'll need a home, some time; and you can have one with us, as long as you behave yourself."

Blessed Sister! As long as I behave myself! And that means? As long as I do just what you would have me. I'll do it, no doubt. I'll cook your husband's dinners, make your children's clothes, help

them to solve their problems, varnish your furniture, arrange your parlor, and wear your cast-off dresses. Will I? Well, not if Ouisse knows herself.

Thoughts similar to these ran through my brain; but I kept my own counsel. Dodie was about to marry and leave the State. My father's health was in a precarious condition, and the physician had warned us that there was scarcely a hope of conquering the disease. The future did not look so bright as it might have; and I thought that, as long as I could, I would endure Nancy's arrogance for the sake of the family.

It is surprising how much we "fiery people" can endure if we decide to do so. If there are any who have never tried it, I should like to have them make the attempt. Possibly they may surprise themselves. Besides, to know one's power in this direction furnishes a goodly amount of enjoyment, and the practice provides a large surplus of "spirit" to be used in cases of emergency.

I confess that I never did make it my special business to practice endurance; but I carried a small stock of the article, and used it occasionally out of policy. This is all that I ask others to do, because I believe that a further employment of the commodity would be detrimental to the cause of progress.

That week of Mrs. Nevin's party was a memorable one for me. On Saturday morning, Mrs. Nel-

son sent me a note stating that Charlie had brought his wife home on the previous evening.

"The naughty boy has been married for three months," the note ran, "but he never wrote me a word about it, and just stepped in last night with his wife."

I told the girl who brought the letter to tell Mrs. Nelson I would be down sometime soon, and went that afternoon. How glad I was that Charlie had found a wife. I had no doubt that she was a worthy woman. I knew Charlie too well to believe that he would have any other kind. He had a level head, and would not be likely to make mistakes from recklessness.

"But what will she look like?" I asked myself. With all my heart, I hoped she was beautiful as well as good. I was almost nervous with anxiety when I neared the house. If I had been going to meet my own fate, I do not think I should have felt greater concern.

The good old lady introduced her "new daughter," with a face glowing with maternal pride. And no wonder! Of medium height, with a perfect aureole of chestnut hair which caught a gleam of gold in the sunlight, with wide-open, violet eyes and lips parted as if in expectation, Charlie's wife was wondrously beautiful. Better than that, she was a sweet, frank, and cultured lady.

I told her that "I was very glad to meet her, her husband had been an old schoolmate of mine, and they had my most earnest wishes for their future happiness."

She thanked me, and added :

"Oh, I know you. Charlie has often talked to me about you, and of what a trusty friend I should have in you when I came to Hammondsville."

I held the slender white hand in mine. I was less than twenty-nine years old ; but I had such a feeling as I might have had if I had been adopting a daughter.

My old friend was not there.

"He thought you would not come till evening, and so went off to the office with his father," his mother explained.

I was glad it had been so. I was glad to have met her when he was not present. I was glad that I should know just what she was like when I met him. And oh, I was so very glad that she was beautiful !

Charlie, learning that I had called during his absence, came up in the evening "to shake hands," and insisted that I should go down home with him.

It was a happy visit. I rejoiced in the good fortune which had fallen to the lot of one of my earliest and best friends. As we talked over old memories, old pranks and punishments, his laugh

rang out with the bright, cheery ring of our school-days. Never was music sweeter to my ears, and my heart was full of a gratitude that I could not have expressed.

That evening, as we sat on the small stoop of his old home, his lovely wife between us, her small hand resting clingingly in his, Charlie told me that "he had met Douglass Wrenner just before he left the city."

"And," said he, "the professor asked me to mention his respectful remembrance of all old Hammondsville friends."

## XVIII.

### FACE TO FACE WITH CIRCUMSTANCES.

Dodie was married and gone. I had been much more concerned about her marriage than I had been over Nancy when she took a similar step. There were reasons for this. Dodie had been a different sort of sister. "Blood is thicker than water," they say; but congeniality is thicker than blood. It's a good thing not to count too much on the ties of relationship. It is not well, because a girl is your daughter or your sister, to believe she will love and trust you if you do keep her feeling as if she were confined in a cell padded with chestnut burrs, or parading around in a straight-jacket of your making. She could come nearer to loving the executioner who tearfully kissed her hands while preparing to draw the black cap over her eyes.

The ties of blood are all well enough so long as they are associated with the proper amount of consideration. Consideration will make up for a great lack of congeniality. Nature is always best; and as congeniality is born, it is better than consideration, which is acquired; but, if two people have not inherited the former, they had better try hard to acquire a competence of the latter, or move into different wards.



But it was not altogether the loss of an agreeable sister that affected me. When Dodie chose a husband and went away to his home, I was beginning to have views of marriage somewhat at variance with those I had possessed ten years before. I had picked these up at different points and periods, as I happened to have opportunity, not being able to get them by experience as most people do. But I have heard it hinted occasionally that "Experience is a dear school;" and, possibly the inaccuracy of my knowledge was balanced by its cheapness.

I had no doubt that my sister and her husband loved each other as fondly as couple ever did; but love between the sexes is like kinship, and needs to be supplemented by many other good things. I had seen beautiful Callie Morrow throw discretion to the wind and desert her home and child to fly with fond, impetuous, masterful Joe Pressley. Both had left clean records behind them. Besides, these, Callie had left a husband, absorbed in business and devoid of sentiment; and Joe had left a lazy, shiftless wife, who had choked his love with scorched victuals and dirty towels.

Love, the golden link between the sexes, needs a good, strong foundation of malleable iron to make it stable; while the iron without the plating of gold will rust itself out and crumble away to dust.

It was with many tears, partly selfish and partly

otherwise, that I had seen my sister whirled away toward the glowing West. Glowing it was with the bright prospects of its inhabitants as well as with the splendors of the setting sun.

At last, I was alone with my parents, one of whom would need but a little care before the soothing touch of Death would end his sufferings. How heavily weighs that responsibility for which one has not bargained, and for which he is unprepared!

The time had come when I must get right down to business for my own sake and that of a mother in the decline of life. We had our little home, but no income worth mentioning. Again and again I cursed the folly and ignorance which had prevented my being prepared for the condition in which I found myself. I was fairly strong, and had sufficient capacity for a profession or other business, but no time now to acquire the proper knowledge of either. After father's death, I spoke of this great defect in my early training, and mother said:

"We never thought of your having to make a living for yourself. We just supposed that you'd marry like other girls and have somebody to keep you."

I didn't say it, but I wondered, "if I had married, what would have become of her." I thought, too, what a great pity it was that people couldn't tell at the birth of a girl baby, whether or not she was one

of the kind that "would marry and have somebody to keep her." It appears to me that Nature has made a great mistake if there is not a stamp or brand by which this matter can be decided; and I desire to call the attention of some scientific man who has a wish to benefit future generations, to this very subject.

But, in justice to myself, I must say that it was not someone to "keep me," that I was anxiously trying to discover, but some way to keep myself—and mother.

I can conscientiously boast of having felt an exhilarating sense of freedom when Nancy said:

"I'd be willing to take mother to live with me, if it wasn't for Simon. She could knit, and patch for the children, and almost pay her way. But he's afraid she might get cross, or something."

I didn't blame Simon for dreading a cross mother-in-law. A saintly wife is as much as anyone ought to be expected to bear. If I were a man, and had my choice, I'd take the mother every time. But tastes differ, and it may be that Simon was satisfied. Still, it appeared that he was not disposed to take another risk.

I told Nancy that "I hadn't expected anything of the kind from them; and, even if Simon were willing, mother's health would not permit her to sew or knit for her living."

I was never burdened with sentimentalism about the duties which children owe to their parents. I considered that the children who were not born were just as well off as those who were. I had a kind of heretical notion that what parents do for their children was an effort to perform the only duty there was in the case over and above the ordinary social obligations.

I had no intention of failing to care for my only remaining parent to the best of my ability, but it was not because I felt it to be a duty, but because I loved her; and I would suggest to those parents who expect future favors from their children, that it will be safer to depend on love than duty.

Fortunately, I was hopeful if I wasn't young, and went to work to make the best of conditions, such as they were. I thought of Old Dan, and wished he was still living, that he might come and board with us. It would have lessened the loneliness and given me strength, to have had that one congenial old friend to sit beside our hearth and take, what he was sure to do, a kindly interest in our welfare.

There was but one opening in the village which promised to us a decent living, and that was to start a boarding-house. The difficulty about it lay in getting such patrons as I was willing to keep. However plainly and cheaply we had to live, I was fully determined not to be surrounded with beings who

were merely animals, and, possibly, dirty animals at that.

As soon as I had arranged the house, and put up a card, my trials began. The first man to put in an appearance was a raw Irishman who had gotten work in the mines. I looked him over, and decided immediately that he was not my kind. When I informed him that "I couldn't accommodate him," he said:

"Oi'll not need much commodathin; jist a plenty to fill up on, an' a wee place to lie down when Oi slape."

I shook my head.

"If it's beds ye be lackin', Oi'll jist put a bit o' sthraw doon in a corner," he insisted.

I felt sorry for the man with his great patient blue eyes, but I had not reached that stage when I could be willing to turn the house into a pig-pen; so I resolutely told him that he would have to look farther.

My efforts to secure the patronage I desired subjected me to much unfavorable criticism.

"She'd better go up and board the angels," observed Mrs. Brown. Judging from reports as to character, I should not have objected to profiting by her suggestion if I had but known where to locate for the purpose. But, from the fact that she was still caring for one of "Brother Lant's chil-

dren," I fancied that she was inclined to give me impractical advice.

"If the men would go to her with a marriage license, she'd never turn the first one away," declared my old enemy, Keziah.

The small breeze which the critics stirred up wafted me the very customers I had desired, although they didn't come with a license. When I became better acquainted with some of them, I decided that this was a fortunate circumstance; but, although they didn't all turn out to be "angels," they were courteous and sufficiently refined to be bearable. Probably they, on the average, were as satisfactory to me, and I to them as would have been the case had I been able to follow Mrs. Brown's suggestion.

## XIX.

### THE MAN WHO COULD HAVE MARRIED.

A boarding-house is a valuable school. I learned much within a few months after going into business. It is surprising how many men do like a well-cooked meal. It is still more surprising to note how the quality of the victuals affects them. I soon found myself able to tell by the conversation at the table whether the potatoes were salted correctly and sufficient sugar used in the apple sauce. If there was no conversation at all, I knew that the meat must be tough or the bread somewhat heavy.

It was not pleasant to know that upon such carnal things as soup, gravy and coffee, depended my fame and fortune; but it was a fact, and I was forced to face it. I heard my neighbor just over the north fence, asking one of my guests if I could "cook fit for anything." I didn't stay to hear the answer. I thought I might sleep better if I didn't.

"Old poke-nose!" I said in fine scorn. At that time, "nibs" had not come to be a component part of the English language, or I should have said "nibs." But I must confess that I thought worse than either. The idea of a woman setting herself to work to find out every weak point of a sister in distress, with the evident intention of making the

worst possible use of the knowledge, was almost too much for my mental equilibrium. I didn't exactly wish the woman over the fence "would die;" because, having a jealous husband, that would have been too great a blessing; but I shouldn't have been a bit sorry if she had had a long sick spell.

I have spoken of myself as "a sister in distress;" and that is just what I was. I didn't like my business even fairly well. I could cook a meal that was far above the average of those which come upon a boarding-house table, but I didn't like to do it. I could set a table that was "a thing of beauty," and I enjoyed doing it, too, but not three times in the same day and seven days in the same week. I could look pleasant in spite of a severe headache, while I dished up the food and served the coffee, but the exercise didn't make me happy. And yet I knew that, if I meant to make a success of my undertaking, I must do all this, and more, too.

If this knowledge didn't constitute affliction, I can't say what would. My case was very different from the position of the woman who caters to the comfort of a man whom the law compels to stay with her whether the board suits him or not. Of course, he can growl; but growling doesn't cause any deficit in the treasury. Besides, she can say her say; and then, if they don't happen to speak to



each other for a week, it doesn't necessarily cut short their rations.

As I couldn't get a law passed compelling my men to pay their board "until death should separate us," I saw nothing to do but to make things as agreeable to them as was in my power to do; and I kept at it, not "with a will," but with all the determination I could summon.

Then there came to me, as a sort of consolation, the recollection that, whatever his calling, each of the other actors on this variety stage was under exactly the same necessity that I was. The clerk in the store, the lawyer in his office, the representative on the floor of Congress, were all under the necessity of exerting themselves to please somebody; and who knew but that it cost them as much effort as cooking cost me. Even the millionaire in his palace was under the necessity of pleasing his cook, or—horror of horrors!—he would have no one to prepare his meals.

So I said to myself: "Ouisse, you might have discovered a more congenial occupation if you had been fitted for it; but, at best, you would have found yourself under considerable constraint; and, if you could have borne that, you can bear a little more. At least, you'll have to try."

One of the worst constraints under which I labored during the first year of my venture, was that

of trying to comprehend Mr. Bunch, one of my earliest boarders.

He was a man sixty years of age. I state his age in the beginning because that was the most important thing about him. He was a short and very stout man with thin, stringy, gray locks that had once been of the blond order, and pale, watery, blue eyes. But his size, great as it was, was as nothing compared with his age.

He reminded people at every possible opportunity that he was "sixty years old." It appeared that he kept harping upon that string to make himself and others believe he didn't mind it; or it may be that he held the fact continually to view lest people should think he was older than the reality; or it is just possible that Mr. Bunch was simply silly. There is said to be an age when all young people are silly; so also there is an age when all old people are the same. Of course, I am speaking of unmarried people. Benedict and Mrs. Benedict are never silly. Marriage is the seal of sound sense. It must be remembered, however, that there are brands of goods which it is not safe to warrant.

Mr. Bunch had pulled in double harness once in his time, but it was long before I knew him. Mrs. Bunch had soon tired of her bargain, and gone to try her luck in the great unknown. Her husband had given her "a very decent funeral," so he was

fond of saying; and no doubt he was right. Most wives do have a decent funeral if they never have anything else that merits that description.

That is another queer trait in the people I have known. They usually put more money into the ground with their dead than they ever allowed them while living; and, frequently, more than they have left for themselves. Women who have never known anything better than a fifty-cent serge while they could stand up to exhibit it, are covered up with four feet of earth in a two-dollar satin. A man who has rested in an oak chair worth two dollars while he could feel, is put away in a plush-covered box of whose splendor he is unconscious. This is all right for those who like it—and the undertakers. But, for my part, I am going to be buried in a plain deal coffin and a muslin shroud. Naturally, if I can put off the performance until this book gets before the public, I shall be able to have whatever I want; but that is all I want.

My doubts about the quality of Mrs. Bunch's funeral being set at rest, Mr. Bunch struck out in a new and very surprising vein.

"I wouldn't have stayed single until I was sixty if I had wanted to marry," he suddenly declared one day when he was late to dinner, and, consequently alone at the table.

I knew he wanted to say more, so I looked into his face the question of which I could not think.

"No, indeed! I've been single for twenty-five years; and I wouldn't have waited that long to marry if I had been inclined to take the step. I could have married a very fine woman twenty years ago."

"No doubt of it," I said demurely, and I didn't mean to tell a falsehood, either. But one might do such a thing without meaning it; and, too, it is so hard to be absolutely certain when one does believe an assertion.

"Of course, I don't blame a woman for wanting to marry. It's only natural."

He waited as if expecting me to confirm his statement, but my mind was so perfectly demoralized by my effort to ascertain the point to which his argument was directed, that I felt confused and failed to get him answered before mother came into the dining-room, when he began talking to her and didn't wait to hear my verdict.

A few days later he reverted to the subject after the other men had left the supper table.

"No," he began, taking up the conversation just where he had left it on the previous occasion, "although I have no intention of marrying, I don't blame a woman for wanting to do so."

It sounded like he might be afraid someone was

going to marry him in spite of himself; which, considering his attractions, I did not think very likely.

"You are very considerate, Mr. Bunch," I said. I had thought out this speech after his first sally, and now that, as I supposed, a general attack was to be made, I concluded that it must be a good time to use it.

"Yes," he continued, "I mean to be considerate. I claim that it is only natural, and I don't blame the woman who marries."

"Then I presume that you don't condemn the men, either."

I thought that, if he must talk, I might as well find out all I could.

"Oh, no," he replied, "I don't censure them for marrying if they want to. If I had cared to do so, I could have married twenty years ago. Five years ought to be considered sufficient time for mourning the loss of a companion."

"But that was not the question. I asked if you considered a man blame-worthy for desiring to enter a matrimonial life."

"No, no—not at all—when—when——"

I would have given a week's board, just then, to have said:

"Yes. When he can get somebody to have him."

But the boy arriving with the supply of beef for the coming day, gave me an opportunity to retreat

to the kitchen; which I did with more precipitation than the boy's movements would warrant.

Before Mr. Bunch got around to the subject again, Cora Redfield, a widowed sister of the physician who made his home at our house, came to spend a week with her brother. She was a clever, pleasant, little creature; and, as a consequence, in just one month after her departure, I was forced to find a new occupant for the room previously occupied by the man who "could have been married if he had wanted to."

I presume that I took a lesson from Mr. Bunch; for, until I came to write this confession, I had never even hinted to anyone that I "could have married if I had wanted to." If I had made a business of doing that, I shouldn't have expected people to believe me any more than I credited the assertions of the fat man who was "sixty years old."

I have noticed that the man whose hat fits him does not seem to think it necessary to mention the fact. It is the fellow who has inherited a fine one from a rich uncle, who has "had to have his hair cut." People don't make excuses for a score with which they are satisfied; nor, if well bred, do they boast very much over holding a winning card.

## XX.

### THE INDIVIDUALIST.

I must confess that I had a horror of new guests. It was not that I was shy of strangers as strangers; but it was strangers as boarders that gave me the chills of apprehension. Every individual man had his peculiar crotchet. One had to have a separate dish on certain days. Another never ate white bread, and must have a separate dish every day. That was all right. When a man pays for an article, it is his privilege to have it served up in a style to suit him; but it was all very galling to my spirit, which wasn't of the serving order. Occasionally the peculiarities of some newcomer were a little too much for my stock of patience and an open rupture was the consequence. The gentleman whom I took to fill Mr. Bunch's place was one of these ultra individualists, and made me sorry that Mr. Bunch had changed his views with regard to marriage.

This young man, James Crink by name, was a student with the physician. When he came to engage the place, he gave me a complete list of his requirements. He wanted a straw pillow, and could not sleep on feathers or straw, but must have a mattress. Then he would have no fried food of

any kind, but desired plenty of crisp cookies for every meal.

I failed to see the difference between a moderate amount of grease in potatoes, and the same amount worked into flour and sugar. But he was a medical student, and ought to know what was good for him. With this thought in my mind, I decided not to argue the question; but told him that I was willing to test my ability to please him.

He made no remarks about his victuals on the first day; but after a night in the bed I had prepared for him, he came down in the morning, rubbing his ear, and said with becoming scorn:

"Great Scott! you don't expect me to sleep on that hard pillow, do you?"

Now, I had taken particular pains in making that pillow, and my indignation was aroused by this remark. I had taken an empty salt-bag to the stable and filled it as full of clean straw as it would hold. When sewed up and evened out, it appeared rather too round; and I had persuaded mother to sit upon it so as to flatten it out. This process worked like a charm, and the pillow was smooth, square and shapely as one could ask. I said to mother, that "I was afraid the thing would be too hard for my head, but I supposed it would suit Mr. Crink."

Now, here were my hopes all fallen to the ground; but as the gentleman kept rubbing his ear,



I restrained my anger sufficiently to ask "what the trouble was."

"Why, the blamed thing is as hard as a board," was the reply.

"You couldn't expect a pillow made of straw to be as soft as feathers," I affirmed.

"Mine at home isn't soft, but it accommodates itself to the shape of my head."

I was ready to confess that there was nothing very accommodating in the rest I had prepared for his head.

"Well, Mr. Crink," I said, "I'll try making another pillow if you'll tell me how yours is made."

He didn't know, but would write and ask his sister; and until we heard from her, he would try to be satisfied with feathers.

The sister's answer came and said :

"Why didn't you tell her that I run the straw through the cutting-box and didn't fill the pillow more than half full."

With the aid of a farmer who had brought me some potatoes, I succeeded in getting a satisfactory pillow, which was, indeed, an improvement over anything of the kind I had ever known. If that had been the end of the trouble, I should have considered myself the winner in the game; but as soon as he found himself in possession of a pillow which met his requirements, Mr. Crink said :

"Now, Madam, that this difficulty is settled, I shall take the opportunity to say that the bed is the most uncomfortable affair I ever slept on. Indeed, I hesitated which to complain about first."

I wondered if he was afraid he would run out of things to complain about, and said :

"For my part, I'd rather have heard of both at once, and then had a rest from complaints."

"Don't get cross. The person who would make such a bed as that was, ought to be glad to be enlightened." He said this as petulantly as a woman. And that is one of the worst things I can say of a man.

"Will you please enlighten me concerning the faults of this bed which was made to your order?"

"I don't know what's wrong with it, but it's as hard as a rock."

"I am sure I don't know how I am to help it. You will have no straw nor feathers, and I got the best mattress in town. I can't see what's to be done unless you write to your sister again."

This he did; and a few days later, she came to town in person.

"Jim," she said, "you're a perfect ninny. Why couldn't you tell her that, at home, you had a straw bed a foot thick under your mattress?"

I began to see that I had a dangerous character to deal with. He was one of those men who, having

been securely under the dominion of the women in his early home, was determined to pay the indignity back upon the first member of the sex who came in his power. I would have pitied the girl who chose him for a husband. To make matters worse, he had no head for anything but effects. I admit that details are tedious; but as long as such things exist, and so much depends upon them, somebody must give them the necessary attention; and who so properly as he who expects to profit by them?

That bed was arranged according to the sister's directions, and was, indeed, a model affair. The girl must have been a housekeeping genius; and would have made an excellent wife for a man who could have borne to let her manage him as well as his bed.

But Mr. Crink's troubles didn't end with his bed. Soon he began to criticize his meals. I bore it as long as I thought it was good for my health; and then I told him he would have to move.

He protested, and said that "we would get along all right after awhile because I learned rapidly."

"No doubt I could learn to do things as you wish if I should live long enough; but I'm afraid to take that risk."

With this retort, I went off to the kitchen to keep from saying anything more. I had a theory that

"Deliver us from temptation" was all right when the proper party took the contract.

The temptation to give him a store of advice for which he would never have thanked me, was pretty strong; but I had a fancy that a reputation as a sermonizer would not be very profitable, and held my tongue, although I was fully persuaded that it would be to the detriment of the young man's future welfare.

I did not care so very much for sending him away. I was becoming accustomed to the annoyances connected with my business, of which dismissals and unannounced departures were but a part.

It does not pay to worry over the inevitable, but everyone does it to some degree. I bore these troubles better than I should have borne such as many people would have considered more trivial. It is just a matter of qualification. One man is qualified to adapt himself to an incongruity which would be unbearable to another, while a reversion of the cases would give the second man the advantage.

Hence, it is not well to measure another's troubles by our own standard; and no one need think that, because I could send a patron away without losing any sleep, I did not lose sleep and shed tears, too, over many other things.

## XXI.

### I SEND A SUNBEAM OUT OF MY LIFE.

I did, indeed, lose considerable sleep over my position and prospects. Many nights I lay awake hour after hour, wondering, much as I had done when a child, if I had really been born for the good of other people. Conviction on the subject was much stronger than it had been in childhood; and I was sure that, if there had been a design behind my coming into the world, it had, undoubtedly been the welfare of somebody about me.

I am not the only person who has this impression. I have yet to meet the man who has not seen the time when he felt compelled to yield his personal pleasure or profit to the interests of kindred or friends. And they all feel it, too. Possibly, those who make the least sacrifice feel it most keenly. I may be of this number. If I am, may I not be allowed to plead as an extenuating circumstance that none of my ties had been voluntarily assumed?

I found myself bound to a disagreeable task because my mother must have a home and provider. I could have gone out into the world and procured more congenial employment, but I couldn't take her with me. Mrs. Nevin's mother, who was now a very old lady, had offered me a home and fair wages

if I would come to the city and be a companion and caretaker to her. Mrs. Nevin, herself, asked me to accept an easy position in her household. The good "Doctor" told me that I was "none too old to study medicine, as many women are doing now-a-days;" and pointed out the course by which his project could be carried out.

Any one of these openings would have suited me better than my present occupation. I had an intense desire to go to the city. My life had been all too narrow for my tastes. I dreamed of many things which I should see and learn in the great world outside of Hammondsville.

Yes, learn. Although more than three decades lay between me and the morning of life, I was still on the lookout for something to store away in my mind. I formed a hundred plans for bettering my lot; but every time I brought up against the same barrier—mother. Never once did I think of deserting her. I felt that circumstances were not quite fair to me; but I saw no way in which I could be willing to escape their injustice.

As if she knew of this feeling, Nancy said to me:

"It's a lucky thing for you, Ouise, that mother is still living. It gives you a home and something to do in the world."

The dear old mother was present, and I couldn't say, as I thought, that I could make a home for my-

self, if I wanted it, as easily as I could make one for two of us. So I replied that I hoped mother would be with me as long as I lived; and I meant it.

We feel the weight of many chains that we would not be willing to lay aside. We cover up the points at which they gall us; and polish, caress, and hug them still. Aside from this, my answer had been most earnest because I had, occasionally, had a glimpse of the fact that, some time, most likely when I was too old to make a new venture, death would take my mother from me, and I should be left entirely alone. I suppose this feeling must have shown itself in my face; for, before I was out of hearing, Nancy said:

"She doesn't seem to have such an awful bad heart, after all."

And then, Douglass Wrenner! The old yearning was in my heart. At times, the old, stormy remonstrance against Fate made me grit my teeth. I sometimes heard of him through the Nevins.

"But he will never consent to come down to visit us," sighed Mrs. Nevin, "and that's the strangest thing in the world."

Did I sleep good every night with these things on my mind? Did I think them over without shedding tears? No, indeed; and that may be one reason why I didn't have any tears to shed over Mr. Crink's departure and other like troubles. When every-

thing is said that can be said, an Old Maid is just a woman, and has an inclination to tears and pretty clothes like all the rest of them.

There are many false impressions among the people, and the popular conception of an Old Maid's character is one of them. A great many centuries ago, the first woman failed to get married. It happened that she was tall, thin, hook-nosed, irascible, hated men and babies, and loved cats. The people sized up this woman's character; and they have used the description for every Old Maid that has been born since—supposing, of course, that Old Maids are born. At any rate, they have made such a portrayal of every one that has died. I hope that one effect of the publication of this book will be to make folks take a few new measures for the benefit of future writers and speakers on the subject.

This isn't the only subject on which men have been very slow to change their ideas. It is a common boast that mankind is progressive but it is also a fact that progression has been constantly hindered by a fatal conservatism. All conservatism isn't fatal; but that kind which makes us hang on to a description, a form, or an idea, which was born hundreds or thousands of years ago comes pretty near meriting the charge of being fatal.

I have not intended the foregoing paragraphs to convey the idea that I considered my life to be void



of sunshine, nor that I thought it much harder than the average. I have written them for the sake of correcting a false impression, and because this is a confession. The sun shone at Hammondsville to about the same extent that it does on other places, and I enjoyed it in spite of the boarders. I am not one of those who are inclined to shut out the light. I like the blinds up and the curtains back in my rooms, and am disposed to manage my heart and brain on the same general principle. I never boxed up my sympathies, nor looked with unfriendly eyes upon the interests of the people around me.

It may have been because of this that I found myself on intimate terms with most of the girls and boys of the village. Girls between twelve and twenty would frequently come in and "help wash the dishes so as to have a good chance to talk." Idle, speculative, visionary conversation it sometimes was, and very silly for *a woman of my years*; but the girls enjoyed it, and so did I.

Among my boy friends, Clinton Delmar was, at one time, the most conspicuous. I ought, rather, to speak of him as a young man; for he was nineteen when he left Hammondsville: and my interest in him and his confidence in me had not abated up to that date. Mr. Delmar, the father of my young friend, was a shiftless blacksmith who had involved his own father in a debt which sent the old man to

end his days in the "County Home." He had no property except his dilapidated shop, and there was no chance for Clint to follow his example even if the boy had been inclined to do so. But Clint was not of that description, thanks to his inheritance from an ambitious, overworked mother.

"Say, Miss Ouisse," he said, sitting down on the steps beside me one spring morning, "I wish you'd tell me what to do."

"What do you want to do, Clint?" I asked.

"Well, you know that I've been talking for more than a year about making a break for myself. I ought to learn a trade, or prepare myself in some way for making my way in the world."

"I thought you were working at your father's trade," I observed.

"Yes, I've been working at it some, and have learned a good deal, too. But you told me once that you feared I wouldn't be doing myself justice by staying here. I begin to see it that way, too. Whatever is made in the shop before I am of age, father will lay claim to; and when that time comes, I'll be forced to make a start for myself without any more capital than I have now."

I could not gainsay this statement. I didn't want to do so, because I thought it would be for the boy's best interest to strike out then for himself. But I was afraid to discourage him too much about his

home prospects, until he had a showing for something better.

"What would you like to try?" I asked.

"I did think I'd like to learn the grocery business, but I can't find a place where I can get enough wages in the start to do more than pay my board; and Mr. Nevin told me where I can get in with an iron company on account of what I know about smithing. I can get a dollar and a half at the start, with a prospect of advance as I improve. I can't wear as good clothes at the work as I could in a grocery; but——"

"But you'll be doing a better business; one that will pay from the start."

"Yes, that's it."

"And who knows but you'll like it better than the store, after all?"

"Nobody does," he answered; "I don't mind the forge very much. It's the life we live here that discourages me." After a short reflection he looked up and added: "And you think I would better take Mr. Nevin's recommendation in one hand and my hat in the other, and leave Hammondsville?"

Yes, I thought so; but how I did hate to tell him. I could have sent any other young man of the village away, with less regret. I wondered how his mother felt about it.

"But," I asked myself, "isn't it Clint's future that is at stake, and not mine or his mother's?"

I spent a few more minutes in considering the subject, and then said:

"See here, Clint, it's not my business to tell you to go or to stay, and, dear knows, I'll be sorry enough to see you leave; but since you ask me which I think the better plan, I must say that, if I were in your place, I would go into the iron mill—or wherever it was that Mr. Nevin suggested. It looks like a much better opening than standing in Russell's grocery."

"I guess I'll take your advice," he returned.

"No," I protested, "you are not to do this because I think it is best. You must study the matter over and decide for yourself."

Clint went into the iron mill, and is, to-day, amply able to provide for his old father, who was never any good to anybody but himself, and very little there.

I had a fit of the blues on the night after his departure. "There," I said, "I have sent another sunbeam out of my life." Then I whispered softly, "But a new one may be born to-morrow."

Let no one think that I wasn't selfish. If I could have coaxed Clint to stay, knowing that I should be content with the consequences, I should probably have done it. I liked his fresh, frank, straightfor-

ward boyishness; and it is most likely that I was somewhat flattered by his friendship. I should have been glad to have him at Hammondsville; and, if my interest in him could have stopped with the possession of his society, I would not have advised him as I did. But, balanced against this pleasure, would have been the pain of seeing him bury his talents. This burying of things away from sight is always sad, but the funeral of a talent is the saddest of all. To watch Clint pursue such a course would have pained me worse than to lose him; and I used my influence to send him away.

I was just as selfish, and no more so, as the old man who told me that, if he had a thousand dollars, he would send his boys away to college; because he expected that, some day, they'd have him to keep.

It is the consequence to self in which other people besides Old Maids are most interested; although the most ultra egoism has the appearance of taking much thought for the good of others.

I would have been fain to omit this statement of my knowledge of the ultimate selfishness of my motives, were it not for the fact that I consider it unusually clever to be able to see so far into the springs of human conduct.

It was once considered great to do what was then called unselfish, but now it is greater to be wise

enough to see that there is no such thing as pure altruism.

This has the appearance of being a very handy doctrine to live by; but the trouble is that we are so much mixed up with the people about us that when we attempt to make "a good thing" out of somebody else, we are just as likely as not to find that we have picked our own pockets.

## XXII.

### MRS. GAZMAN AND THE WOMAN OVER THE NORTH FENCE.

Among the many petty annoyances which fell to my lot, Mrs. Gazman, the woman on the left of us, was one of the worst. She had come to live there on her marriage eight years before. I admit that I never liked her; but was disposed to temporize because I thought it probable that she liked me no better than I liked her.

As we must live so close together, I thought it best to treat her with neighborly courtesy, although I knew that we could never be real friends. It was plain that we didn't have the congeniality, but I was determined to use my share of consideration.

She was a tender, loving thing while she was in the loving humor, but as treacherous as a March wind when she wasn't. When her children did not irritate her, she loved them dearly; but she made rough warfare upon them the moment she lost her patience. Sometimes, by dint of much slapping and jerking, she managed to get the best in the battle; but quite as frequently the children came off victors.

As the years went by, her disposition changed for the worse, as is certain to be the case when folks do not make an effort to hold their evil propensi-

ties in check. Everybody has these tendencies in some degree, and life is hard enough to develop them for everyone if they are not made the objects of continual warfare.

This was what Mrs. Gazman refused to do. She chose, rather, to make guerrilla-like expeditions against the conditions on which such tendencies thrive. It is poor policy to hope that we can remodel circumstances to conform to our peculiarities, and so Mrs. Gazman found; but instead of changing her tactics, she contented herself with grumbling about the hardships of her lot.

She was incessantly talking about the time when they would all "have to go to the poor-house," or wondering "what in the world we will find to eat next winter," or declaring that the children didn't have clothes fit to be seen on the street, or speculating as to whether "Jim cared for anything in the world but his paper and a cigar."

On one occasion when she had made the last observation, I could not refrain from saying that "Mr. Gazman was certainly a very kind husband in spite of these faults."

"Oh, yes!" she declared, "he's all right as long as he has his way. I don't say much, but I'd like to have things my way sometimes."

I felt guilty at the thought of prolonging the conversation. I knew it was none of my business.



But I knew, too, that Mr. Gazman was disposed to gratify her wishes whenever they bordered on reason; although he had insisted on putting a roof on the kitchen instead of getting a parlor carpet when he could not afford to do both. I don't mean that she was a spendthrift. She was just impractical and impatient of privations. The knowledge of her husband's sterling worth, which was very evident, notwithstanding their moderate circumstances, goaded me on to say:

"Well, it is some consolation to you that Mr. Gazman's ways are mostly pretty good ones."

"Yes, you're like all the rest," she said testily; "everybody seems to think that he knows it all. But they don't have him to live with."

"No," I replied with all the air of innocence I could command, "but then they didn't marry him."

"Oh, you think you're cute!" she cried, "but he was all right before we were married. He got me everything I wanted—then."

"No doubt there seems to be a difference," I said, not noticing her merited rebuke, "but you must remember that you didn't want so many things then, and that there were not four little ones to want things, too. Say! what's the matter with your baby, yonder?"

Turning toward her home, she uttered a shrill cry of fright at the sight of her youngest child, who

lay on the porch floor perfectly unconscious, its tiny hands covered with blood.

"There! she's got her pa's razor!" Mrs. Gazman cried in hurried excitement; "she's played in that closet a hundred times, and never got hurt before. Oh, she's killed! she's killed!"

She lifted the child, who immediately opened its eyes, and sat down with it in her lap. I remembered to have heard her say that the babe always fainted at the sight of blood, and took off my apron and wrapped its bleeding hands; but I was not in time to prevent Mr. Gazman, who was coming up the path, from seeing them. There lay the razor, and he read the whole story at a glance.

"Oh, Cora!" he cried, "you've been letting Allie play in that closet again."

"Yes, but she never got hurt there before."

"Of course not. But there are so many dangerous things in it; and you know I've always been afraid. Here, let me have her, and I'll wash her hands. Look out! You'll be fainting, too, in a minute. Get some water and bathe your face."

"Oh, it don't matter for me," she said, full of pettishness in spite of the child's misfortune; "if Allie had been killed, I'd have to be scolded."

I wanted to run away and let them fight their own battle, but decided that it might look best to stay and assist with the child. I brought some water,

and then gave Mr. Gazman my bonnet to hold over the child's face that she might not see the blood while I was washing her hands.

Mrs. Gazman sat on the edge of the porch, sobbing, and complaining about "the trials that a mother has to bear." No one proffered her any sympathy, and she rose to enter the house just as her eldest boy came in from the street. Grabbing him by the shoulder, she shook him violently saying:

"There! you've been running again! I've a mind to give you a good whipping."

Again she took her place on the porch, and the husband put the injured child in her lap. There she sat, crying, kissing it, and moaning "poor baby poor baby!" while Mr. Gazman cleaned off the razor and took it into the house and I went back into our yard, wondering where it would all end.

The time came when the Gazman children began to make themselves offensive to my guests, and I was forced to tell their mother that "she would have to keep them out of our yard."

She gave two of them severe whippings, and then began an abusive tirade against "men who were too shiftless to get homes of their own."

I wondered if she supposed that the manner in which she conducted herself and her home would encourage them to make the investment; but I con-

tented myself with combating what I called "the injustice of her remarks;" whereupon she hinted that "it would be a good thing if Old Maids would attend to their own affairs."

Then I told her that "it might be a blessing for her if she would get somebody to attend to hers for her, and if she didn't manage the children better, I'd have to put the case before their father."

I didn't need to tell him. He had been standing at the gate, and had heard all the conversation. As soon as I had retired from the scene, he went into the house, and said:

"Cora, your conduct is trying me beyond all endurance. You're a good little wife if you would only learn to use some judgment, but I can't stand these unreasonable outbursts."

She came back at him with a charge of "taking the part of that thing next door;" and then they had their first quarrel in which Mr. Gazman did his share of the talking.

That night the husband left his home. He took the baby with him, and left directions for the disposal of the other children.

Early in the morning the eldest boy came and told me that "his mother wanted me, quick." It seemed peculiar that she should send for me whom she had so often and so violently criticized. I think that, after all, she knew I never meant her any

harm, and that all the harsh things I had ever said to her were true.

I knew it if she didn't.

The shock I received when I learned the situation of affairs made me almost wish that I had taken her side of the struggle. She sat with the children gathered in her arms, moaning as if her heart were truly broken. For the first time in many years, she did "Poor Jim" full justice, and lamented her own shortcomings.

The sight was pitiable in the extreme; and, although I knew that she deserved her fate, I could not help feeling that I must help her. I immediately set about it, and in my effort to find friends for her, I found that she had been so reckless in her remarks about my support of her husband's conduct, as to leave the impression that I had been trying to win him away from her. The idea was too absurd to be treated seriously; and I went ahead and enlisted the help of Mr. Nevin, Dr. Doyle, and some others, who soon succeeded in locating the man and persuading him to return.

For a time, Mrs. Gazman made an effort to be more considerate in her conduct; but she was too old, or her mind too badly warped, to learn; and soon she gravitated back to the old level.

Mr. Gazman sold his property and moved into another community. I was truly glad when they

were gone. Their presence had affected me much after the manner of a dusty March wind, or a "stone-bruise" on my foot. While I stayed in the house, the dust didn't bother me; and while I sat still, the bruise was not painful. But one can't sit still, or stay indoors and make a living.

What I regretted then, and still regret, is that I was ever foolish enough to try to make a woman see her husband's good qualities, by pointing them out to her. I had never done it before and shall not try it again; and I would warn the rest of the Sisterhood against the method. I had much better success with the woman over the north fence, who was always complaining of her husband's jealousy.

I told her that "I didn't see why he should be jealous, but that that was undoubtedly the reason he didn't provide her with enough to eat."

"What do you mean?" she asked. "He is a good provider, and brings in more than there is any use to cook."

"Well! that is a wonder," I declared, as if I knew all about it from experience, "anyway, he doesn't get you decent clothes. You've been wearing that old brown merino for two years at least."

"Yes," she answered, excitedly, "but I've had a black silk in the drawer for ten months. I know I ought to make it up."

I knew about the silk as well as she did; and now

that I had gone so far, I decided to risk another step. So I said :

"I'll tell you now ! the only thing for you to do is to give him cause to be jealous. Don't give him any reason to think you care for him. Don't make over him a bit. He's not the only handsome man in the world."

She stared at me for a minute, and then said :

"If you don't beat the dickens !" Then she got up and crept through the hole in the fence.

I presume that she must have taken a second look at her husband when he came home that evening and decided that he was handsome ; and I fancy, too, that she might have "made over" him rather more than was customary. These conclusions are based on the facts that he did not go to the store as usual, and that friends soon began to note a better understanding between them, and that the black silk was in evidence on the street before one would have thought it possible to get it made.

It may be said that I had no business having anything to say in either of these cases ; but how was I to help it ? If married women will run about and gossip about their domestic affairs, how are we to keep from hearing them ? And, hearing and being possessed of opinions, how are we to keep from speaking, if it is no more than to tell them that "we don't want to hear it ?"

## XXIII.

### IN A SISTER'S HOME.

For months, and even years, my life ran on so very monotonously that there was nothing, not even a thought worth telling. It was the regular round of new boarders taking the places of those who had gone; house-cleaning in the spring and again in the fall; baking twice each week; and cooking every day.

No, that wasn't all, and but a small percentage. It would be too tiresome for me to even think it all over. Some things are worse in their contemplation than in their execution, and house-keeping is one of them. When reduced to its last analysis, it is simply the taking up and doing, regularly and well, a multitude of small but skilful tasks; and requires, first of all, a goodly stock of patience. Although, as I think, I was not born with an average supply of this article, necessity was giving me a better harvest than could have been expected from so small a beginning.

But, as so often happens when one is becoming properly fitted to a condition, a change came which left me all at sea again. My mother, never rugged, was seized with a severe attack of rheumatism; and I was forced to dismiss my patrons, and devote my-



self to her care. For weeks, we despaired of her life; but finally the disease loosened its hold and spared her to us, though as a confirmed and almost helpless cripple. When her health became all that I could hope it ever would be, I began to make arrangements for taking back the boarders. But the neighbors protested, and even Nancy said that "she didn't think I could do justice to both mother and the guests."

Knowing that I had spent nearly all of our reserve fund during mother's illness, and that to live we must eat; and thinking, too, that my friends were probably very nearly right in their views of the matter, I looked hopelessly at them, and asked:

"Well! What am I to do?"

Mrs. Nelson suggested that "I might do what sewing I could."

Remembering my former experience in that line I said scornfully:

"In all the time I'd have to devote to it, I couldn't make enough that way to buy face powder."

"Oh, I'll lend you enough corn starch for that," she declared, laughing at my scoff.

The Nevins advocated the renting of a part of the house and a dependence upon chance to furnish further means.

"I'll give you many little things to do," said the

wife, "and no doubt your sister here will help to provide for her mother."

In answer to Mrs. Nevin's appeal, Nancy said:

"Yes, oh, yes! we'll help."

Before I could come to a conclusion, mother had a relapse of several days; and I was ready to listen to Nancy's proposal when she said:

"There's no help for it, Ouisse, you'll have to bring mother and come to our house."

"But what about Simon?" I asked.

"He says that he 'supposes we'd better try it.' Some folks keep telling us we ought to; but I don't see that it concerns them."

"Nancy," I said very deliberately,—I had to be deliberate to keep my voice from trembling,—"I don't consider you under any obligations to take us into your home. Mother can't live very long at best, and I have persuaded her to mortgage the house for enough to keep us going. We'll rent all but two of the rooms, which will help some; and I'll do what I can."

"I suppose you could do that way; but Simon told me to tell you to come along and we'd do the best we could. So I think you'd better come."

I knew just how "Simon had told her." I knew that one of them had argued the other down; but that she was willing for him to have whatever credit was due to their course. Nancy never begrudged

Simon, or anyone, any amount of credit ; so long as things went her way. And, to her credit be it said, if she ever did yield to him, she never complained about it.

I hesitated some time, and then said :

"I scarcely know whether we could manage it, or not."

"I think we can," she returned, in a tone which told that she was much in earnest about the matter. "I expect the rent of the house will clothe you, and you can do what work you have time for to help pay your board. The girls are so busy with their school and music that I can find something for you to do."

I thought of other things beside board and clothes, which would be needful to an invalid and a nurse ; and I thought, with a sigh, of being at her beck and call. We argued the matter, but as she developed an antipathy to the scheme of mortgaging the property, I told her that "we would go and try it if mother said so."

It takes grit to do the things which are repugnant, even when we consider them the best for our interests. I never do them under any other circumstances, and I don't know what it would take to attempt them if I didn't think I had to.

Besides the mental grit used in accepting Nancy's proposal, I gritted my teeth. I suppose that's

physical grit. But I schooled myself down to meet conditions before the time came to change our abode. That's one good quality I have. When I decide upon a course of action, I take on, as nearly as I can tell, just the necessary steam to suit the grade and schedule. I had no idea that we would move very fast at Nancy's home; but I knew the grade would be rather heavy, and thought it best to have a good supply of power so as to avoid the necessity of sudden firing up.

No one who reads this will suppose that the scheme could work, and I didn't count much on it, either; but for a couple of months it bade fair to disappoint me. Nancy found plenty for me to do whenever mother did not need my attention. She arranged that I should wash the dishes on Sunday afternoons and evenings, because "she had time, then, to see after our patient."

I had enough enjoyment out of her little subterfuge to pay me for my work when it suited me to do it; and when it didn't suit me I didn't do it. But I tried to be reasonable, and I think I was.

It happened that our first serious difference came when I received a note from Mrs. Nevin, which read as follows:

"Mr. Nevin has just received a telegram stating that we have lost our dear friend, Professor Wrenner. He died last night, and the funeral is set for

the day after to-morrow. I would like to go with Mr. Nevins, but don't think I can do so unless you will undertake to keep Gerritt for me. The poor little fellow has been sick for a few days, and, although better, he is scarcely able to travel.

"I know that, situated as you are, this is asking too much of you; but I know of no other place where he would stay and could be kept. He might be left at home, but, as you know, he cannot abide Mrs. Murphy.

"Now, dear, if you will undertake this charge for me, I will try to return your kindness as soon as I get back home.

"Lovingly yours,

"Mollie."

Dead! Dead! Lost always, and dead at last!

In answer to my friend, I told her to send the child to me as soon as it suited her to do so. He was a small boy of less than four years; and in preparing for his reception, I remembered an old crib bed which I had seen in Nancy's attic. I had not thought of consulting her about taking the child, but I did go down and ask her if I might get the crib.

Laughing at what she believed to be a good joke, she said:

"What do you want with a crib? I thought you'd been fortunate enough never to need one."

It was foolish, I know; but in defiance of every effort to restrain them, the big tears rolled down my cheeks, and my chin trembled as I answered:

"It may be fortunate, Nancy, but I have never been able to feel that way."

I left the room to get some water that I meant to take up to mother; and when I came back, Nancy eyed me much as she would have done the latest wonder from Africa. So strange it is, we never take stock of such blessings, or think of the aching void in the hearts of the people who do not have them.

Again Nancy asked me what I wanted with the bed, and I explained the circumstances to her. She made no answer, and I thought no more about it until I was ready to go after the crib. Then I went down and asked if one of the girls couldn't help.

"I'd rather not have that old thing moved, Ouise," said my sister; and then she pursed her lips up as tightly as if she never intended to open them again.

"Why! Nancy, I'll not hurt the thing. Being moved will just get the dust off it."

"I don't care about the dust; but I don't want the old thing sitting around in my rooms."

"I didn't expect to put it in your rooms. I want it in my own," I declared with some show of spirit.

"Your own?" she returned with just the least hint of sarcasm.

I don't think she meant to be offensive—at least not so much so; but she felt the importance of her situation, and let her thoughts slip out without intending it.

I wasn't ready to quarrel with her. If I had been, I could have made that expression serve as an excuse. But, in renting our house, I had reserved the right to claim two of the rooms at any time; and the knowledge that I could leave her at my pleasure, made me more tolerant than I would otherwise have been.

"It would do no harm to bring the crib down," I said, "but if you will not have it so, I can manage Gerritt without it."

"I wish you hadn't promised to take the child," she complained.

"Why so?" I asked.

"He'll be a nuisance, running over things; and he'll make oceans of dirt."

Such extravagant expressions were unusual with Nancy, and I began to think that I should have trouble about keeping my promise to Mrs. Nevin. But I knew a way to carry my present purpose with Nancy, although it might make the future more difficult. It was simply to set her at defiance. When she saw she couldn't carry her point, she was a perfect Xenophon on a retreat. So I proceeded with my declaration of independence.

"The crib can stay where it is; and I'll see that the child does no serious harm. But Gerritt will stay with me while his mother is away, whether you like it or not."

Nancy opened her lips, but I never moved my eyes from her face, and she closed them again. She knew there was a "thus far and no farther" in my nature, and that she had reached the "no farther." She directed one of the girls to assist me with the crib, and added:

"It's all right this time, but don't make any more such promises."

From that time, there was more friction. Nancy took it into her head that "it was her Christian duty to help more with the nursing;" but she invariably had some disagreeable task which must be performed at the same time; and, as a natural consequence, I must do the performing. Moreover, she didn't think it looked well "for a woman of forty to have so many girls and boys tagging home with her every time she went on the street." I laughed at the thought that she was exaggerating my age somewhat, but the difference wasn't worth arguing about. Then she decided that, "small as our income from the house was, I should have contented myself with my old black duck dress for another summer. Anyway, she didn't think that cream and black lawn



looked well on one after her hairs began to get grey."

I usually smiled, or rather sneered, at her hints; but when she made this last one, I said:

"Oh, Nancy! you make me tired. What's the use of wearing an old, faded dress, and looking like a moving mummy, when one can be gay in a ten-cent lawn?"

"Sometimes people get too old to be gay," she retorted.

"Some people do," I answered. "Some folks are born that way; but I'm not one of the kind. I'll not draw my hair down flat, like you wear yours, if I live to be a hundred years old."

"I should think it would be more in keeping with your position to do it that way," she declared.

"I'm not going to take the trouble to fit myself to my position. I'm going to fit my position to me. I'd just as soon think of fitting myself down to Freddy's knickerbockers, or of putting my hundred and sixty pounds into little Ellie's pajamas, as to think of making myself over after your pattern of an Old Maid."

## XXIV.

### NANCY WAS WILLING.

“Mamma has invited Cousin John to come.”

My youngest niece gave me the above information with the air of one who has told something wonderful. The “Cousin John” was a Mr. John Wineman, who was a cousin to her father. I was surprised that Nancy should have taken this step, because the cousins had not been on friendly terms since the settlement of the German legacy; at which time, both had tried to get the advantage, and neither knew which had failed. Hence, both were doubtful and jealous.

Mr. Wineman’s visit proved a very enjoyable affair. He was a man of experience, and a good conversationalist. The earlier portion of his life had been spent in Cleveland, the Eldorado of my childish dreams. His tales of the theaters, libraries, and museums of that city, and of the beautiful Erie beside it, made me almost wish that I hadn’t backed out when I started to run away to the place.

When his visit came to an end I was truly sorry, and felt grateful to Nancy for urging him to come again at an early date.

When the visitor was gone, the old friction was about as much in evidence as it had been before. It

wasn't so very great—not enough at any one point to send forth the spark which would strike a fire; but it was just so constant that it began to be irritating. It was just my overshoes taken away from behind the kitchen door and set off the steps on the outside; or the book I had laid down on the parlor table, carried out and stuck up on the shelf in the kitchen closet; or a hint of being crowded; or a criticism of mother's complaining; or a dozen other little things; no one of which, by itself, would have amounted to anything.

I was beginning to get pretty tired of it all, and thinking seriously of going back home and trying my old plan; when Nancy came in one day and handed me a bright red neck ribbon. Red was becoming to me, and I was charmed at the sight of it, although I wondered that Nancy should have chosen anything so bright. I thanked her earnestly, and she replied:

“Now I want you to wear it all next week.”

“All next week! Why? I thought it was for extra occasions.”

“Next week is going to be an extra occasion. John is coming back.”

“Mr. Wineman!” I cried in genuine surprise. “You don't mean it, Nancy?”

“Yes, I do,” she assured me. “I knew he thought pretty well of you when he was here; and I wasn't

a bit surprised when he accepted my invitation to come back, in less than a week after I had given it. Now, you wear that ribbon and behave yourself; and the first thing you know, you'll have a fine home less than fifty miles up the C. & P."

"You think he'll marry the ribbon," I said, half amused and half angry.

"No, I don't mean that. He said, when he was telling me that he had half a mind to marry, that you were a charming woman."

"You didn't believe it did you, Nancy? Well, you can hand him over my thanks for the compliment if you want to; but don't let you and I make fools of ourselves. You know I couldn't marry while mother lives, even if I had a chance that suited me."

"Yes, you could," she asserted. "You could take her to live with you; and as for being suited, I'd think you'd be suited with a rich man like John, who could give you such a nice home."

"I don't suppose you would like to admit that you married Simon just for the sake of a home?"

"No, but I was young then; and now you're not."

"Yes, I am, Nancy; I'm younger now than you were then. Don't you know that I'm still expecting the 'Prince in disguise' to come and marry me? He's to come and work in the mines, and I'm going to love him so well that I'll marry him in spite of

dirt and drudgery; and then, as soon as the ceremony is over, he is going to put on his fine clothes and tell me who he is."

Although I laughed until my sides ached at the absurdity of the picture, my sister sat staring at me with a face as solemn as a church before the congregation arrives. There is no such word as "joke" in Nancy's dictionary. It is all dead earnestness with her. She sat still, with her eyes on the floor, doubtlessly considering the advisability of calling Dr. Doyle and the Probate Judge to visit me.

I wore the red ribbon, and Mr. Wineman was exceedingly pleasant; but with all his cordiality, I could scent a hint of some inward distrust. I think it possible that he was, naturally, of a suspicious disposition. And, too, there may have been something to make him so. I never did blame people for reading the bulletins which others unconsciously post concerning their motives.

Nancy and I were sitting on the porch one evening, and Mr. Wineman came and took a place beside us. He had been to call on Mr. Nevin; and was inclined to compare Hammondsville with his home town in a manner unfavorable to the former.

"I don't see what Nevin stays here for," he said. "If I were in his place I would sell out and go away. It costs too much to mine this coal. The operators up at our place are doing much better."

"I suppose Mr. Nevin has been trying to get you to bring your mills down here," observed Nancy.

"Yes, he has; but I wouldn't come down here if he gave me enough land to set the mills down on, and a big bonus beside. I'm doing well enough where I am."

Then he launched into a description of his business and a new residence he had built, and wound up a description of his prospects by saying:

"I wouldn't object to marriage, now, if I could find a woman who didn't want me just for the little money I've got."

"Don't set yourself such a difficult task, Mr. Wineman," I pleaded mockingly; and Nancy, not being able to adjust her thoughts to the tone of my remarks, went indoors.

"Do you really think women are so mercenary?" he questioned.

"No doubt of it," I asserted, refusing to take the matter seriously.

"You wouldn't marry me for my property, would you?" he asked, falling in with my bantering mood.

"Of course I would, if I didn't have to take care of my mother," I answered.

Coming through the door at that minute, Nancy hastened to say:

"Mother wouldn't be a bit in the way, and she needn't stop on that account."

Confused for a moment, Mr. Wineman regained his self-control, and said :

“There! You see how it is. What do you say?”

With one of my old fiery blushes, I retorted :

“I’m not quite in position to accept your fortune, Mr. Wineman, but I think Nancy is.”

## XXV.

### A WOMAN WITH BORROWED FEATURES.

A week after Mr. Wineman's visit we were back in our old home. For some time before his coming, I had fancied that Nancy was getting tired of us; and the failure of her little scheme brought matters to a crisis. I hadn't "behaved" to suit her, and she didn't hesitate to tell me that "she thought people who were so independent shouldn't expect help from their friends."

I didn't blame my sister for not wanting us in her home; but why had she asked us to come? What is the use of attempting a task of which we are incapable, just because the world expects it? People would have respected Nancy just as much if she had failed to offer her mother a home as they did when the experiment had proved a failure. And she and I would have felt better toward each other if it had never been made.

Mother was so pleased to be back in the old place, that I was glad we had come. She urged me to "get that mortgage fixed so we could have money as we needed it." Nancy and her husband thought "this was poor business management;" but as they could suggest no other way out of the difficulty, I took no heed of their objections. To me, the most



unsatisfactory condition of the affair was that Mr. Nevin made the terms so easy I feared they did not do him justice.

I settled down to nurse mother and do an occasional hour's work for the public, with some degree of complacency. For me, the future was fixed. It is some comfort to know just what one is going to do, if that is no more than to slide down hill. He can then fold himself up snugly, and obey the law of gravitation without useless struggles, and will be in so much better condition when he reaches the bottom.

Much of the pleasure which followed my return was due to the people who lived in the house with us. There is an old proverb which says that "no house is large enough for two families;" but very much depends on the families. No doubt it is pleasanter for each family to have its own house, just as it is more healthful for each person to have his own bed; but if, in either case, a doubling up is unavoidable, the proper course to follow is for each party to resolve not to be the first to kick.

I believe in aiming high if one is to have several shots; and this is why I have placed the foregoing resolution at the head of the list. But it is really firing at too great an angle for the average child of a progress which has been built upon the law of self-preservation. Hence, I would suggest that it

be supplemented by a determination not to give others cause to kick,—first, last, or any time.

It would appear that, properly put into practice, these two resolutions would enable fire and gunpowder to rest contentedly in the same can. But there are some things in nature which resolution cannot overcome, and this is why so much depends upon the families.

There are families of powder and families of fire, and it is safest for the two styles not to rent the different sides of a double cottage, no matter how scarce real-estate may be. There is no undertaking in which there is not some risk; but if one knows himself and the other family pretty thoroughly, it may be safe to make the attempt; and yet, with all this precaution, I would not advise the insurance companies to take much risk on the outcome.

The Gordons were neither powder nor fire; and, no matter what I was, it wasn't much trouble for us to get on together as smoothly as we could wish. We had been back home as much as six months when Mrs. Gordon said:

"I tell you, Ouse, we've been getting along nicely so far; but I'm expecting trouble in the future."

"What's going to happen?" I asked.

"I can't say just what. But that Brumble woman from Saline is going to move into the Gazman property; and with a widow on one side and an Old

Maid in the house with me, I think there's a prospect for something else besides fun."

Mrs. Gordon's bright eyes were starry with mischief, and I thought what a pity it was that she should ever have anything but fun. Certain it was if trouble ever came to her, it would not be of her making.

"Mamma, are widows worse than Old Maids?" asked Helen, the twelve-year-old daughter.

"I don't know as they are. But that's bad enough," replied the mother, looking as solemn as if she were at her own funeral.

"Well, then, maybe we can stand Widow Brumble. I don't mind Miss Ouisse very bad."

After this remark of somewhat doubtful meaning, the girl stepped up beside me and whispered in my ear:

"You tell mamma I need a new white dress this summer."

"But I don't know whether you do, or not," I replied aloud.

"But you will know when I tell you about it. Dessie is going to stay with your mother while you run up to see Mrs. Nevin, and I'm going with you."

"Better wait till you're invited," cautioned the mother.

"If I did that, I'm afraid I wouldn't get to go," cried the girl airily, taking down her hat.

As we passed out the front door, we saw Mrs. Brumble going into her new home.

On our way up the street, Helen said :

"Miss Ouisse, what makes girls be Old Maids?"

"I suppose it's because the boys don't like them," I answered. "Are you afraid you'll have to be one?"

"Oh, no!" she said with a confident air, "I'm going to get married. I don't want to be an Old Maid, but I wouldn't mind being like you would have been if somebody had married you."

"Do you think it would have made me so very different, Helen?"

"Not so much, only you'd have a man and some children."

Silly child! She wasn't old enough to know that the lover and the babies were not the important consideration. In her youthful ignorance, she thought as does every other girl of her age, that these were needed to make her life complete.

After awhile she will be wiser. She will learn that babies are decidedly inconvenient, and that the lover, though a very agreeable possession, is altogether eclipsed by a husband with a large mercantile house, a bank, or a railroad. She will learn that seal-skins are more comfortable than soft words, and diamonds better than kisses.

It may take a great many lessons to teach her this,

but if her instructors are of average ability, she will grasp the idea some time, though possibly, not until after it is too late to profit by it.

I thought of all this; and then I thought:

"Are not the children wiser? Is not their point of view the proper one? And would it not be better to conform their training to the principle that love and motherhood are the crowning glories of a woman's life?"

I was, obviously, not the person to answer these questions, but there was no reason why I shouldn't think about them. And I well knew that there was something missing out of my own life. I knew that I had dreamed of babies that were my own. I knew that, in my waking hours, I had felt a strange and irrepressible longing at the sight of little children. I knew that I had caught myself reaching out and clasping the thin, empty air; while bright eyes, dimpled faces, and chubby hands seemed to be floating just beyond.

Two days after her arrival, I went to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Brumble. My knock was answered by a short, plump, rosy-cheeked woman with scowling blue eyes and thin, drawn lips. She impressed me immediately as being a borrower. Surely, she had borrowed either her form and color or the eyes and mouth which she displayed. It didn't seem possible for the two sets of features to

have grown up together. But, sometimes, Nature gets a funny spell, and undertakes to baffle our judgment. Or, it may be that our knowledge is not yet sufficient to comprehend all the tricks of the great Mother of the Universe.

I tried to introduce myself, but Mrs. Brumble must have failed to understand me; for, in a borrowed voice, she said:

"Are you the preacher's wife?"

I smilingly explained that "I didn't have the honor of being anybody's wife, but that I was her next-door neighbor, and had called to make her acquaintance."

"Yes!" she said, as if she were very much surprised; and then she added: "You can come in."

I accepted the permission, and stepped into her darkened front room.

She did not raise a blind, but sat down opposite me and waited for me to begin the conversation. It is not necessary to say that I didn't feel just as comfortable as I had done before, but I made an effort to talk a few commonplaces. Receiving only the shortest possible answers and no sign that my hostess was enjoying my call, I cut it rather shorter than is required by the laws of etiquette, and didn't repeat it. In reply to my invitation to "come in and see us," Mrs. Brumble said:

"I don't visit much. I don't believe in troubling

people. I never borrow nor lend. I don't keep cats nor fowls, and I don't want other people's in my yard."

"Of all the women! Of all the women!"

I said it over at every step from Mrs. Brumble's door to our own.

I have a very strong sense of personal property rights, myself; and I would have no more thought of allowing my chickens—if I had owned any—to go into her yard, than I would have contemplated using her tooth-brush. There were no fowls of any kind upon our lot; unless, perchance, the English sparrow be called a fowl; but in their case, we didn't want them any more than she did. And why should she be giving me all these hints? I had called, and it was perfectly proper for her to tell me to stay away. Better to do that than to wait until I came again, and then step to the door and tell me that "she wasn't at home." But to mention borrowing and chickens, of which we had given her no experience, was carrying the matter a little too far. I almost wished that I had a few Plymouth Rocks. Indeed, I felt tempted to go to the grocery and invest twenty-five cents in an old hen to turn loose in her yard. Evidently, she was one of those people who are always hunting trouble, and I do dislike to see folks disappointed.

The next I saw of Mrs. Brumble was the day

on which Mrs. Gordon did her washing, when the neighbor came to the fence, and said:

"Madame, will you please throw your wash-water where it'll not run down on my garden?"

Mrs. Gordon laughed, and replied that "it was all right;" but little Helen, who was helping her mother, glibly remarked:

"Madame, I shouldn't think the water would hurt your garden this dry weather."

The woman came to be a perfect recluse so far as personal friendship went. When people knocked at her door, she contrived to mistake them for agents, beggars, or "the preacher's wife." This lady, hearing of her manners, did not venture to call, a circumstance which I think disappointed Mrs. Brumble very much. It was noticed that she attended church very regularly, and invariably succeeded in getting a chance to shake hands with the minister.

She received an occasional visit from a woman who had been a neighbor to her in her old home. Sometimes this friend brought her husband along with her, but it was plain that he did not come to visit, but just because he was brought.

"I'd sooner be one of those mummies that I saw in the museum, than to be that woman next door," declared Mrs. Gordon; and I agreed with her.

"May be she'll be a mummy soon enough," as-



sented Helen, who came in at the back door, "for she just asked me to go and bring her the doctor."

Mrs. Gordon went in and asked if the sick woman wanted any help, but Mrs. Brumble declared she wanted "nothing of the kind." As the physician came away, we made inquiry about his patient, and learned that "she was quite poorly with an acute attack of neuralgia, but had directed him not to come again unless he was sent for."

Not seeing or hearing anything from our neighbor, Dr. Doyle put his kind, old, gray face in at our window and asked if we knew how she was getting along.

We knew no more than if he had buried her on his former visit, and he asked if I wouldn't go in and see how she was.

There was no answer to my first rap, nor the second, nor yet the third. Then I went round and tried at the back of the house, but all to no purpose. When I reported, the doctor said that "we must know what had become of her;" and then he summoned help and broke open the door.

As we feared, the woman was dead—"had been twenty-four hours," the doctor said. The disease had gone to her heart, possibly for want of the attention which she could have had for the asking. Nay, for the mere acceptance.

Thus it came about that Mrs. Brumble had no

longer any need to fear the neighbors. She may never have realized it, but those simple village people felt that it might do to live solitary, but was surely unfortunate to die alone.

But what was Mrs. Brumble's death to me? What were all the deaths that had come in the years gone by, when the day arrived on which a sudden aggravation of my mother's disease made it necessary for us to make her a tiny home under the sweet white clover in the village graveyard?

There comes, sometimes, a grief which is too keen to be expressed. Two lives are often bound so long and so closely together, that when one fails the other lies heavy on the hands of its owner.

In the awful gloom of those days, what did it matter to me that the next step was to sell the old home and divide the proceeds between the physician and our noble friend, Lindley Nevin? What was home to me now? There is no home where there are no loved ones.

Brave, sunny Mrs. Gordon, and other trusty friends gathered around me, and held my trembling hands and wiped the tears away; but my heart, their faces, and the very winds around us, kept crying:

"Alone! Alone!"

## XXVI.

### AND NOW WE ARE READY FOR THE ENCORE.

At last I was a lone Old Maid with no ties in the world. Married sisters did not count—not even the best of them. They had their own, and I was not of them. Though with much of kindly interest in each other, the feeling of mutual dependence, the only binding tie, was gone. At last I had nothing but myself on my hands, and began to wonder what I was going to do with my burden.

Then I conceived the idea of writing this book. I hope it will be said that I “have done well;” but, if anyone fails to make this observation, I stand ready to forgive him, provided he buys the book. In these times, books are made to sell. That is the main consideration; but I hope this of mine will prove entertaining also.

It does seem that I have lived a long time; but I am not old yet. I have attained the grey hairs, the big pompadour, a pair of bi-focal glasses, a large amount of surplus flesh, a better temper than I started out with, and, considering the location, a very creditable fund of experience.

There are a few things which have not come into my possession. The first of these is a fortune. This, I am beginning to need pretty badly. Nancy says

she believes it to be her "Christian duty to give me a home," and suggests that I will find it a pleasure to "iron the girls' shirt-waists and wash up the front porch of a morning."

"I won't ask you to work for your board, Ouisse," she says, "but now that you have got into a way of doing something, you won't want to be idle; and I'll try hard to find you something to pass the time away."

No doubt she would! Nancy always could find something for folks to do. Probably she would let me scrub the kitchen floor. She might even condescend to let me scrape the fish. I don't think she would permit me to cook them, or anything else. She keeps getting more and more cleanly every day; and I don't fancy she would consider me up to her standard. However, I haven't moved in yet. I tried that once, and I believe I'll consider the matter before I do it again. I have a presentiment that the fortune, or some other good thing, is coming my way; and, if they should fail to make port in time, I may venture to inspect the lodgings at a place they call "The County Infirmary." This really is a very fine mansion; and if they will reserve one of the choice suites for me, it may be as good as I ought to expect.

Among the other things which have failed to come my way, are wrinkles and a husband. Up to

date, these have not put in an appearance. I will scarcely be living up to my promises if I fail to *confess* in this connection that Major Julian Northrup does make an occasional call; but I can say with perfect accuracy that he has never yet come in the capacity of a husband.

I consider, however, that there is ample time for both the husband and the wrinkles to arrive; and I find myself unable to decide which it would be best to have first. If I should begin with the man, he might object to the appearance of the wrinkles; and if I stock up with wrinkles, it will lessen my chances of getting a man. This is, indeed, a terrible quandary; and I will take it kindly if somebody will advise me what to do. There would be a considerable advantage in giving the precedence to the man. It would obviate the immediate necessity of my going to Nancy, or looking for lodgings elsewhere. That is: I hope it would do this; although it might make it necessary for me to hunt lodgings for two. But there is some risk in every venture, I suppose. Still, I have learned lately that Major Northrup has purchased that "cozy residence" on which I had set my heart about the time I began to write this book.

This "Major" to whom I find myself referring is a handsome old gentleman and would really be an ornament to that or any other place. He is, I admit,

somewhat up in years,—fully ten years older than I am, by actual calculation—but he carries himself erect and is very brisk. Moreover, he is quite a brainy man and something of a scholar. Well! if I can't have that house myself, I would rather he had it than anybody else within my knowledge. Still, the house is really large enough for two, as the Major, himself, told me the other day when he overtook me as I was coming home from a call on Mrs. Nevin.

Isn't it strange, though, how some men never seem old like others do? Only night before last, I had a peculiar dream that put this into my head. It seemed that I was sitting in a railway coach; and that a tall, handsome, young man with black hair and the bluest of eyes occupied the seat behind me. There was no revelation as to who this young man was, or in what relation we stood to each other; but I thought that, when I laid my head back against the top of my chair, intending to say something to my fellow-traveler, he leaned familiarly over me and pressed his cheek to mine with a great show of tenderness; and the act made me so very happy and contented that I didn't dream about Nancy, or the infirmary, at all that night. But the strangest part of it all is, that when I woke up in the morning, I saw plainly that the young man of my dreams was no other than Julian Northrup—or, rather, what

Mr. Northrup must have been twenty-five years ago. No doubt it was very foolish for an Old Maid to dream such things; but then, in my dream, I forgot I was an Old Maid.

It may be hinted that the proper thing would be to wind up this story with a marriage ceremony. That is the way such things used to be done; but it isn't the style now. Besides, the suggestion is impractical for the reason that, if I should get married before I finished this book, it wouldn't be the "Confessions of an Old Maid;" and it would be a pity to spoil a good title for the sake of a husband. No doubt a *nice* husband would be a nice thing to have. I never did doubt that; and, when such a possession will not interfere with more valuable interests, I shall make an effort to decide between the Major and the wrinkles.

Among the many criticisms heaped upon this volume, will be the remark that its philosophy is inconsistent. This will be a waste of words. I haven't tried to make it consistent. My life has not been a shining example of that virtue; and, in a Confession, how can my philosophy differ from my life? Perhaps, some time, I shall write a consistent philosophy; but I wouldn't advise anyone to attempt its practice. The only consistent philosophy which it would be safe to put in the play, would be the snapping-turtle variety, *i.e.*, Stay in your shell except

when you want to snap. Everybody snaps sometimes, but only turtles do it every time they put their heads out.

As an apology for any lack of harmony which may be discovered between the separate ideas and acts of my life, I will say that I am perfectly willing for any man, or woman, whose life has been as long as mine, to try his or her hand at writing a *confession* containing a consistent philosophy.

I never, intentionally, disappoint anybody. I think it is a great pity to do this. Hence, it will be understood that, if in the beginning of this volume I raised any hopes which I have failed to gratify, it is from no will of my own, but is altogether the fault of circumstances. I can't help what my life has been, and it was surely more promising at the beginning that it has ever been since. But, as I have aimed to do my best under every circumstance of life, so I have tried to do my best on this book ; and

Now we are ready for the encore.



